

You Don't See What I See:
Multiple Publics and Public Policy
in a Los Angeles Gang War

by

Karen Nora Umemoto

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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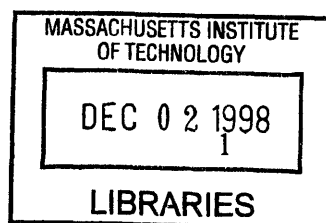
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ABSTRACT

An analytical concept of multiple publics is presented and applied to a case study of a gang conflict in Venice, California during 1993-1994. The concept of multiple publics is based on the assumption that individuals have many identities that vary in salience or relevance across situations. Publics represent groups based on the shared salience of identity group boundaries in a particular situation. Each public shares a unique interpretive lens through which they read events, actions and information. The composition and constellation of publics can change as situations change or are reframed. Over ten-month period, what was commonly referred to as a "gang war" broke out between two predominantly Latino gangs and one African-American gang. Seventeen people were killed and over 50 were injured. Of those killed, less than one-third were claimed as members the rival gangs in conflict. This gang-generated conflict led to racial tensions and polarization within the larger geographic neighborhood.

An examination of the conflict through the lens of multiple publics reveals a series of shifts in the major line of cleavage over time--from persons to families to gangs to race and back to gangs. Shifts in the major line of cleavage represented changes in the relative salience of identity group boundaries among the many individuals involved or affected by the war. With each shift during its escalation, the intensity of conflict grew while the size of constituencies and publics were enlarged. Conversely, changing conditions and appeals to alternative identities led to shifts in salient group boundaries that opened opportunities for peace negotiations between two of the three gangs in conflict.

The analysis of multiple publics in the case study shows four practices that may be useful in addressing similar conflicts. They are described as: 1) mapping multiple publics and multiple identities, 2) seeing from the lens of multiple publics, 3) reframing situations and opening dialogue, and 4) situationally identifying moral communities to which one is obliged.

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This is dedicated to those who lost their lives and love ones in hopes that the tragic events will not be repeated.

YOU DON'T SEE WHAT I SEE: MULTIPLE PUBLICS AND PUBLIC POLICY IN A LOS ANGELES GANG WAR

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Prologue

Most of my growing up years were spent alongside major Los Angeles freeway intersections. In a place like Los Angeles, freeways are the “railroad tracks” that separate neighborhoods from one another. Driving under the freeway underpass was often like passing through a gateway into another world. I grew up in Gardena which was at that time one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in the country. To the south was what was then the middle-class white suburb of Torrance. To the north was the then-predominantly African American community of Watts. To the east was the racially mixed blue-collar town of Compton. To the west were the predominantly white and middle-class the coastal cities of Hermosa and Manhattan Beach. Gardena was what I called a “buffer zone” community, separating the predominately white suburbs from communities of color.

Growing up in a place like Gardena, you’re well aware from a young age that people live very different lives, speaking different languages, use different slang, practice different faiths and rituals, enjoy different standards of livings and have access to different privileges. You learn to “code switch” as they say in the field of bilingual education. But instead of switching from one language to another, you occasionally switch cultural and experiential worldviews. Even as a third generation Japanese American raised in Los Angeles public schools, I would find my voice going up a whole octave and my head lowering about a foot immediately after walking onto the grounds of my grandmother’s church. In other situations, I would not know how to really switch or wouldn’t feel the need to, but I would know that words and actions did not mean the same thing to all people present. I was acutely aware that differences in past experiences can lead to radically different interpretations of the same phenomena and of the difficulty in explaining across worldviews.

Perhaps that’s why I related strongly to the chorus on Warren G’s hit rap album when he sang, *“You don’t see what I see, everyday as Warren G. You don’t hear what I hear, it’s so hard to live through these years.”* Sometimes you wouldn’t even try to explain yourself to someone, feeling overwhelmed with everything they would need to know in order to understand.

When I started interviewing people for my dissertation research on the racialized gang conflict in Venice, one of the first things that struck me was the fact that there were vastly different stories about what was going on there. I did not know how I would be

able to reconcile these different accounts or to separate “myth from fact.” Upon reflection, it soon occurred to me that that was in fact the story -- that there were different views of the same phenomena which made it that much for difficult to find an effective solution. The coexistence of “multiple realities” is the current reality of US society, especially in such diverse cities as Los Angeles as it had been through my childhood years.

For policymakers and residents alike, reconciling conflicting realities in the policymaking arena is perhaps one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. This became even more apparent to me in the aftermath of the Los Angeles Police Department trial in the beating of Rodney King and in the O.J. Simpson trial as I witnessed the potential of such events to further fragment society. On one hand, the generous media attention given to these two events produced a public forum for debate much in line with our notions of deliberative democracy. Yet, due in part to the exploitative nature of some of the media coverage, but more significantly due to the differences in perceptions and judgments based on differences in beliefs and life experiences of viewers and participants, the chasms created by the jury decisions were enormous. In aired debates following the juries’ decisions, we learned more about how different we are but little about the nature and background of our differences.

As the global village continues to shrink, our ability to traverse points-of-view becomes more critical. This is not an easy task, as I’ve learned from my own life experiences and from this case study. To capture the many vantage points and to understand the interplay between them is almost impossible to do in a way that does justice to all voices. Mine is a modest attempt in this endeavor. I know full well that there will likely be disagreement with the depictions and characterizations of groups and their positions surrounding the case of the gang conflict in Venice and Mar Vista, for no two people saw things the same way. I only hope that this effort and the framework I have tried to provide can teach us how we can be more reflective and what we need to understand in order to find collaborative solutions to the problems we face. In this way, I hope this study contributes to overcoming the larger challenge we face -- the challenge of creating more inclusive, democratic and consensual decisionmaking processes in a world of multiple publics.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I heard that there had been some shootings and some Hispanics had been killed by some African-Americans. And then vice-versa...I didn't think so much of that initially. But then it seemed to trigger another shooting. And then it was happening during broad daylight. And then it happened in front of Venice High School. And then I realized that this was escalating and the people's fears were escalating, and then the anger was escalating. And I said, "You know. We could have our very own race war right, right here in our backyard."

-Father Beruman
St. Clements Church

The neighborhood of Oakwood sits in the northwest quadrant of Venice, California, just minutes from the famed Venice beach on the westernmost edge of Los Angeles. It is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the region and one of the more racially integrated, with African American, Latino, white, Asian American, and Native American families living side by side. Architecturally, Oakwood is equally diverse, with one-hundred year old bungalows situated alongside newly erected condominiums. Fourteen HUD-subsidized apartment buildings are also found scattered through the one-square mile neighborhood of approximately 10,000 residents. The diversity of architectural styles also reflects the vast differences in income and wealth among neighbors who, though living in close proximity, lead lifestyles worlds apart.

A gang war in Venice

For nearly a year, from the summer of 1993 through the spring of 1994, Oakwood looked like an abandoned town. Few ventured onto the sidewalks even in the middle of the day. The playground and park were deserted. Residents barricaded their porch windows with old furniture and wooden doors. Some bedded their children down in their bathtubs for protection through the night. The silence that plagued the neighborhood was uncharacteristic of this residential community that normally bustled with life.

Over a ten month period, this Los Angeles neighborhood was the center of what became commonly referred to as a "gang war" that left 17 African American and Latino residents dead and over 50 injured. Less than one-third of those killed were members of the gangs in conflict. Others were either mistaken for gang members, were former gang affiliates, or were simply at the wrong place at the wrong time. The anguish over the loss of loved ones, the fear instilled in residents, the strain in social relations between neighbors and the physical pain and losses suffered by gunshot victims were immeasurable.

The gang war involved three different gangs: the Culver City Boys, the V13 and the Venice Shoreline Crips, the former two comprised of Latinos and the latter comprised of African Americans, with some exceptions within each. The war began as a battle over turf and competition over the drug trade in the Mar Vista Gardens housing project between the Culver City Boys and the Shoreline Crips. It later shifted to the nearby neighborhood of Oakwood where tensions between the V13 and Shoreline Crips had also begun. Both locations were home to a high concentration of low-income residents surrounded by middle- and upper-income residential tracts. As such, they became “drive-thru” drug distribution points attracting customers from Santa Monica to the north and Marina del Rey to the south and provided gang members an economic niche in an underground economy. While the initial fighting in the Mar Vista Gardens housing project concerned competition in the drug trade, the battle lines were also drawn in defense of honor and reputation. Retaliatory rounds of violence spurred its escalation.

Several months into the fighting, many in the community feared that racial targeting was taking place, particularly as it became evident that some of the victims had no gang affiliation. Several African American victims who were not known to be gang members were suspected to have been killed by Latino gang members, and several older Latino men who were not gang-affiliated were suspected to have been killed by African American gang affiliates. In late November 1993, the headlines of the local daily *Outlook* and the *Venice-Marina News* respectively proclaimed, “Deadly Venice gang war turns to race war.” In characterizing the violence, the article read “In the beginning, it appeared gang members were targeted, but in recent weeks targets were apparently chosen because of their race.”¹

As more victims fell to the violence, tensions along racial cleavages grew. African American and Latino residents who had freely interacted over many generations were suddenly faced with mounting racial tensions generated by the gang conflict. Some of the fear and anger took the form of racial animosity, even among those who felt themselves immune to racial bias. Social polarization throughout many segments of the neighborhood made it increasingly difficult to create meaningful dialogue across color lines.

A call to arms

The Oakwood “gang war” sounded a call to arms throughout government agencies in the city and county of Los Angeles. Gang violence was epidemic throughout the region, registering a record 800 gang homicides in Los Angeles county in 1992 (Katz 1993). Yet, this particular conflict was unique in several ways. Unlike gang violence in other sections of the city, this gang war drew special attention among government and business leaders due to the fact that Venice was a major visitor destination and played a

critical role in the regional tourist economy. Tourism had already been crippled by the civil unrest of 1992 following the acquittal of Los Angeles police officers in the beating of Rodney King. The protection of the Venice boardwalk from further disruption was crucial to the rebound of the industry.

Not only did the location of the violence create alarm among those concerned about the local economy, but it gave the war greater symbolic meaning. While gang violence has ripped through communities such as South Central, San Pedro, Long Beach and East Los Angeles in years past, the Oakwood gang war caught the attention of a wider middle-class population due to its location.² Venice was traditionally a middle-class neighborhood assumed to be immune from this level of violence. Writer and professor Kevin Starr described the angst that gripped the westside's broad middle class as he explained in a *Los Angeles Times* opinion piece, "What began as a power struggle over crack-cocaine sales has escalated into something that should send a chill down the spine of every Angeleno: The Venice killings threaten the identity of Los Angeles as a city." He went on to state that the "fear and terror would do violence to the very nature of Los Angeles" and what was underway was "a struggle for the soul of Los Angeles itself."³

The outbreak of gang violence in Venice was also unique in that it represented a shift in the character of gang conflict in the region. Gang conflict in Los Angeles' recent history had been intra-racial, that is, between gangs of the same racial make-up. There were only sporadic gang fights between Black, Latino, Asian and white gangs through most of the 1980s. This is partly due to the historically segregated residential pattern of the county. But a change had begun to occur. Gang violence on the streets were reflecting the increase in inter-racial violence among California inmates. Numerous race riots in the prison system were reported to have erupted, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Morain 1996). City officials and gang intervention organizations began reporting an increase in inter-racial gang conflict at the street level in the early 1990s, though they were not completely absent before then.⁴ The ability of government agencies and communities to control the spread of inter-racial gang violence would serve as an indication of the preparedness of the city to address a changing social problem.

This presented a new challenge for law enforcement agencies, community organizations and concerned individuals who responded to the gang conflict. A number of recent events had sown divisions along racial cleavages: conflict between African American residents and Korean merchants over the proliferation of liquor stores in South Central, the Los Angeles Police Department officers' beating of motorist Rodney King, conflict between whites and non-whites and between non-whites over the principles and

implementation of affirmative action and, debates over immigration policy and multilingualism, among others. Like a pattern of earthquake faultlines, the energy released along one fault line often sent tremors down another. The interracial character of the gang war tended to overlay with other arenas of social conflict, making it difficult to isolate the impacts of the war and the impacts of official interventions in response to it from the larger map of social discord.

Various law enforcement agencies took action in response to the war. They included the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), Office of the City Attorney, Office of the County Attorney, County Probation Department, State Office of Corrections, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). The most visible law enforcement presence among them was the LAPD, which conducted several major operations in an effort to suppress the violence.

Non-law enforcement government agencies and officials also came to the scene: City Councilwoman Ruth Galanter and her staff, several state legislative aides, US Department of Justice community relations officers, and staff of the Los Angeles City and Los Angeles County Human Relations Commissions as well as the City Recreation and Parks Department. Among residents and community-based organizations, there were many groups and individuals that worked to find a path towards peace. Church leaders, several former and active gang members, community activists, gang prevention workers, and others pursued various strategies to nudge the warring gangs towards a truce.

The problem of conflict in an age of diversity

The gang war that generated racial antagonism and polarization in Venice is neither a unique nor new phenomenon. What is noteworthy about this case, however, is its reflection of the more complex set of social conditions within which contemporary urban conflict escalates as compared to earlier periods of urban history. Metropolitan areas such as New York and Los Angeles are home to people of a multitude of racial, ethnic, class, religious, generational, ideological, language and occupational backgrounds, to name a few categories of difference. Along each dimension of difference, individuals share traditions, sensibilities, and identity group boundaries. Individuals play many different roles in contemporary society and identify with many groups; no single social category can be used to describe the multiple roles and identities that any one individual may hold.

Additionally, unlike earlier periods during which conflict more commonly occurred between unequal status groups, contemporary urban conflicts often take place between members of groups which have relatively or equal and minimal influence over local economic, political or social institutions. In a growing number of multiracial cities, for

example, no single racial or ethnic group holds monopoly representation in local government, though government agencies and elected officials may remain swayed by political shifts and propertied interests dominated by select groups. Interethnic and interracial relations are oftentimes in a state of flux, coalesced and strained at the same time by contending social forces. Identity politics often results in shifting lines of cleavage along any number of identity group boundaries.

In short, the dynamics of conflict and the role of government institutions in cases of conflict are much more complex in the multi-layered and variegated texture of the contemporary urban landscape—one in which the salience of group borders and identity boundaries are multiple, situational and shifting. As I will elaborate further, groups defined by the situationally shared salience of identity group boundaries comprise “publics” which share interpretive frameworks and act or react to a given situation. Given the possible combinations of identity boundaries that may be salient for individuals in a particular setting, we can say we live in a world of multiple publics. As situations change, so may the composition of publics which respond to or act upon them. In one situation, individuals may mobilize along combined racial and gender identity boundaries while in another situation, the same individuals may organize around class and home ownership interests. We can argue that group formation is predicated on the relative salience of identity group boundaries for individuals in a particular situation. Understanding the shifting constellation of publics, particularly in conflict-ridden circumstances, may help us mediate conflicts and better govern ourselves in an age of increasing diversity.

A study of multiple publics and social conflict

The purpose of this study is to examine a case involving social conflict in an economically and racially diverse community by applying the concept of multiple publics in order to develop a deeper understanding of social conflict and the impacts of public policy in an age of increasing diversity. More specifically to the case, I focus on the following research question: How can the concept of multiple publics help us understand the escalation and resolution of conflict in the case of the gang war? Within this inquiry, I explore the following: What were salient identity group boundaries that defined multiple publics? How did publics interpret events and actions differently? How did their interpretation of events, including explanatory narratives of events and definitions of “us” and “them,” shape their responses to those events? What were the consequences of tried interventions given variable interpretations among multiple publics?

I propose a concept of “multiple publics” as a way of understanding group formation and intergroup conflict. I define multiple publics *as emergent groups defined by*

the situationally shared salience of identity group boundaries. The concept of publics is based on the assumption that individuals have many different identities and that those identities vary in relative significance depending on the particular situation or setting (Hofman 1988, Okamura 1981, Paden 1970, Tajfel 1981, Turner 1984). Social identity is that part of an individual's self-concept derived from one's knowledge of membership in a social group(s) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel 1981). Shared identity group boundaries can stem from a variety of shared characteristics and roles, such as socioeconomic position, occupation, family role, place of residence, historical memory, material interests, religious beliefs, gender, ethnicity and race. The relative significance of any one social identity may change from one situation to another. In one situation, for example, race and gender may take on more significance while in another, occupation and party affiliation may have greater relevance (Turner 1982). Sets of salient identities form links between the self and membership in groups. Publics emerge based on the relevance of certain identity markers to a given situation as interpreted by those individuals; combinations of salient identity markers distinguish one public from another.

These publics share a common lens through which they interpret events, analyze phenomena, and give meaning to them. Situationally salient identity markers capture common frames of reference, norms, values, ideological leanings, interests and affinities. They are the formal or informal groups and networks that participate in or take action upon a situation or problem as they define them. Unlike formal organizations, publics often traverse organizational memberships, acknowledging the ambivalence that organizational members may feel in situations where they may identify more strongly with individuals at odds with their formal organizational role in a given situation. The concept of publics is also different from the idea of "interest groups" as defined by shared tangible goals which drive rational choice and group behavior. Though formal roles and tangible goals affect the salience and centrality of social identities, they are not necessarily the main determinants of boundary maintenance. Individuals assume and are ascribed a variety of roles in society just as they may value a range of goods, from material to symbolic or spiritual. The concept of publics assumes that what individuals value, whether material or immaterial, may change situationally and cause one to alter the role that one chooses to play at a specific moment based on one's reading and interpretation of events. It emphasizes situational specificity, socially defined values and the role of interpretation in the formation and of mobilization of groups. Given this brief definition, we can see that the composition of publics and alliances between them may shift over time. Publics are somewhat fluid groups which reform and realign themselves as either events unfold or as situations are

reinterpreted. Publics can be seen as “invisible organizations,” potentially taking collective action and affecting a situation, sometimes regardless of any formal associations or tangible interests.

In a world of multiple publics, a social problem can take on different meanings to different publics. They may be affected by and identify with a problem in different ways. They may attribute causal factors, theorize others’ motives and respond to the problem in ways that bring them in conflict with other publics. Conflicts between publics can arise from the mere fact that different people see different realities--each public sees a social problems through a unique interpretive lens. As a consequence, social problems often generate controversy and conflict between people who may be only indirectly affected by events surrounding a problem as the ensuing actions or discursive framing of the problem may drive a wedge between those who come to be defined as “us” and “them.”

Depending on the meanings imputed to events by the various publics, actions can be read differently from their intended meaning. Social conflict can be exacerbated through a series of misinterpretations over the course of interactions. The social construction of the “other” as well as the “we” can easily take place independent from any verification of intentions or attributes among defined publics. The same is true for government actions and policies. Intervention by government agents can be interpreted by different publics in different ways. Some interpretations may result in unintended policy consequences. This phenomenon is particularly problematic for stratified, heterogeneous, multicultural societies.

The case study

The process of racial polarization generated by the gang conflict can be understood in terms of shifts in salient group identity boundaries and the formation and reformation of publics over time. In the early stages of conflict in Venice, the problem was seen as a feud between certain individuals and families. Those affected by the events acted in accordance to their assumed roles. As battle lines were drawn along gang boundaries, new publics emerged, including a number of gangs as well as law enforcement coalitions and residents affected by the violence. Law enforcement personnel as well as residents grouped according to ideological views about crime and gang violence which also tended to overlap with boundaries of race and class. When media reports and the perceived pattern of violence indicated racial targeting of victims, the salience of racial identity among a larger geographic population was heightened, particularly with the increased feared that one may be victimized or protected according to physical characteristics associated with racial categories. This broader audience, whose attention was drawn to the war in response to

reports of racial targeting, comprised new publics based on the primary salience of race. The more that race was perceived to be a predictor of victimization, the more that racial identification tended to maintain primacy over other identity markers in the formation and mobilization of publics among the affected population. Furthermore, the more widespread the victim body count in gang war was being tracked along racial categories (as opposed to gang membership) in the media as well as in popular discourse, the greater the temptation for gang members to discriminate along those categories to uphold their position and reputation in the war. The result was greater racial distancing and eventual polarization among many of the neighborhood's residents.

Definitional discourse over the nature of the problem revealed the changes in the perceived characteristics of the conflict, contests over its meaning and the drawing of lines of division. Debates concerning the interpretation of events--the motive of participants, the representation of victims and perpetrators, risks and opportunities of subsequent actions and distillation of the "facts" of events themselves--all affected the reformation of publics moving from one set of events to another as contests over interpretation were integrally tied to the mobilization of people and popular opinion. Furthermore, differing interpretations among publics made for a complicated set of social dynamics. For those interested in ending the violence or resolving the conflict, the minefield of multiple publics was such that any one action could be interpreted in numerous ways. For government agencies fulfilling policy mandates in their interventions, it was not uncommon for actions to lead to unintended consequences as to a result of multiple interpretations and reactions among publics.

For example, while major police suppression activities were supported by many residents, they were interpreted by others as part of a "gentrification conspiracy" on the part of police in cahoots with real estate developers to rid the neighborhood of low income families beginning with African American residents, many of whom believed they were targeted as suspects by police over their Latino neighbors. For residents who believed they were slighted by law enforcement officials due to race, race became even more salient relative to their other identities whether it be their roles in the family or allegiances to friends or associates across racial boundaries. Even though some may have objected to gang activities among relatives or acquaintances, the salience of race would, in these situations, often overshadow cross-racial identification that may have been more salient under previous circumstances and that may have led to cross racial opportunities for mediation.

In other words, some actions fueled the process of racial polarization based on an interpretation of events regardless of intent. The gentrification theory began to gain

currency among a growing public defined primarily along racial and class boundaries. Support or opposition to police practices implied support or opposition to gentrification as certain publics linked both issues in debates over explanatory narratives. As the case study will illustrate, the rising salience of racial boundaries and the meanings attached to racial categories through an iterative series of events and interactions led to racial polarization generated by gang-related conflict. However, just as the gang conflict had become racialized, a process of deracialization was central to reaching a truce agreement to settle the conflict. The application of the concept of multiple publics can help us understand the generation of racial divisions as well as explained the process of peacemaking in this case study.

The case study narrative is structured upon three propositions. Together, they form an argument which I summarize as follows:

1. We live in a world of “multiple publics,” which can be defined along sets of shared identity group boundaries. These “publics” can be identified and described in terms of their historical bases, the salience and centrality of identity group boundaries along which publics are defined, the situational nature of their formation, and the interpretive lenses shared by each public.
2. Defined in this manner, publics can differ in the way they view a problem, prescribe solutions, and interpret events and the actions of other publics. These differences can manifest themselves in conflicting responses to social problems among and between publics, formal government agencies and non-governmental organizations.
3. When intervening in social problems, particularly social conflicts such as gang violence, interventions which fail to adequately consider the range of possible responses among a constellation of multiple publics can often lead to unintended consequences, including the exacerbation of social tensions. Conversely, those interventions which are considered in light of multiple publics possess a greater ability to find common ground and coordinate efforts towards jointly formulated goals.

Methodology

The field study was conducted over a two-year period from fall 1993 through fall 1995. It was begun during the first several months of the gang war and field research continued for approximately one year following the end of the war. A combination of research methods were utilized to gather relevant data and a narrative frame analysis was the approach utilized to understand and interpret the events.

Frame analysis

One way in which we can understand group differences in the definition of interests and the interpretation of events and actions is through the study of frames. Frames can be defined as socially constructed lenses through which individuals or groups view the world. Erving Goffman (1974), a pioneer in the development and application of frame analysis, proposed this method in recognition of three concerns: 1) any event can be described in terms of a focus that includes a wide swath or a narrow one; 2) in most situations, there are many things happening simultaneously; and 3) the retrospective characterization of the "same" event may differ widely. The study of frames can help us to identify differing points of view by understanding the selection of facts, the establishment of truths, the definition of self and other, and the lenses through which interpretations are made and acted upon (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, Schön and Rein 1994). Schön and Rein (1994) have applied the method of frame analysis to understand conflict between parties surrounding several policy controversies and suggest we study public controversy as frame conflicts. Parties to policy controversies see issues, policies and policy situations in different and competing ways that embody different systems of belief. They state that frames determine what counts as a fact and how one makes the normative leap from fact to prescriptions for action. The analysis of interpretive frames also aids in our understanding of the roles of symbols, stories, and rumors. Rumors, myths, and the creation of symbols ripe with meanings specific to a group can serve as "techniques of power" to exert control within the group or over other groups. Power and knowledge, inseparable as in Foucault's view, can be seen as taking various forms in a conflict such as that in Venice.

The selection of research methods was driven by the type of data needed to conduct an analysis of the different vantage points of multiple publics and to understand the salient group boundaries along which conflict and cooperation resulted. Several types of data were necessary in order to understand the emergence of multiple publics, the shifts in salient group boundaries, and the impact of government actions on the conflict and on social relations within the neighborhood. First, historical accounts of the development of Venice and its Oakwood neighborhood were important to understand the basis for different historical narratives and collective memories of different groups within it. This included the politics, economics, social organization, and demographic trends which shaped its development. Second, an inventory of multiple publics and the shifts in salient group boundaries which defined them were needed. This included an assessment of both formal organizations within the community and its surroundings, the government agencies involved in responding to the war, and informal networks which responded to the war and to the actions of government agencies. And third, local media accounts of the war were

needed to trace the framing of the war to the broader audience of residents who, if not directly affected by the war, were audience to it.

Based on the need for these three types of data, various research methods were used. The three primary ones included: archival research, participant observation and interviews. This chapter will describe the types of archival research, participant observation, and interview methods I employed, the types of data collected and the limitations of these data.

Archival research

I relied on three types of archival data: a) historical accounts of Venice and its Oakwood neighborhood; b) census data tracking socioeconomic and demographic trends; and c) newspaper articles chronicling the gang war and surrounding events.

Venice is one of the most researched areas of Los Angeles, due to its long and colorful social history as well as its landmark architectural features. Of the many published volumes this history, I drew upon those which told more of its social history. In addition to these secondary sources, I also culled through primary documents which included government and non-governmental documents. Government documents included Los Angeles City Planning Commission proposals and plans as well as minutes from planning meetings and town meetings concerning the Venice area. Also, Los Angeles Police Department plans for the Oakwood neighborhood were also obtained. In addition, several community-based organizations opened their files for my perusal. Their documents were mainly those pertaining to their organizational history, but also included photographs and accounts of events within the neighborhood more broadly.

Census data were used to gain a quantitative understanding of the socioeconomic and demographic changes which have taken place in the Venice area, particularly over the three decades prior to the war, from 1960 through 1990. The area of Oakwood neatly falls into two census tracts, split from its originally tract after the 1960 census. Income, home ownership, race, poverty, household size, home prices, nativity, immigrant status, English-speaking ability, and other characteristics over time were extracted and analyzed.

One local newspaper, the *Outlook*, and one regional newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*, were reviewed for their coverage of events related to the gang war and to race relations. The *Outlook* newspaper provided the most regular and detailed coverage while that of the *Los Angeles Times* was very sporadic. Data in the form of newspaper coverage served two purposes. One was the chronicling of events and listing of names, places, and incidents. The second was the documentation of a media framing of events, which helps to explain some of the popular interpretations of those events and reactions to them. In other words, media sources were not only a source of some of the “factual” information, but

also the documentation of interpretive frames which, in turn, shaped the framing of the events among multiple publics.

Participant observation

I entered the site to begin field research in October 1993, approximately one month following the start of the war (incidents leading up to the war took place in Oakwood earlier that year and in Mar Vista Gardens over the previous year). While I went into the field with the intention of simply making field observations and conducting interviews, I became a participant observer over time. I started out attending meetings among residents and community organizations who were trying to find avenues to reclaim peace and work to provide gang members alternatives to that particular lifestyle. I found that by participating in these efforts, I was able to better understand the sentiments and viewpoints of the various groups and individuals who were working for a peaceful outcome while at the same time, able to reciprocate in some way for the generosity with which many individuals shared their thoughts and feelings.

There were various activities in which I took part, some with more involvement than others. Along with other residents, I participated in a peace march sponsored by a coalition of churches situated in Oakwood. I attended a Mother's Day Rally which honored various individuals, including one former resident whose son was one of the victims of the war. I also worked with several community based organizations on efforts to implement cultural diversity awareness and conflict mediation training among their constituents. I attended meetings of Oakwood United, an umbrella network of community organizations and social service agencies which are charged with serving the Oakwood area. I participated in the organization of a community-wide dinner sponsored by numerous organizations under the ad hoc coalition called Bridge the Gap to reinforce the truce that was eventually reached. This group also resurrected the Venice chapter of Pop Warner Football League in anticipation of the need for recreational activities during the summer following the truce agreement. And finally, I attended various public meetings held by or with government officials and agencies, including elected officials and law enforcement.

As a participant observer, I tried to contribute to collective efforts given my own principles as well as my strengths and limitations. I joined in activities based on my understanding of the problem and my own set of moral beliefs and principles. I mainly participated in collective and collaborative efforts which were initiated by residents and which raised the public call for peace. One of the ways in which I was able to contribute was through my writing skills, helping with such things as proposals and leaflets. One of my limitations was my "non-resident" status, as I lived several miles outside of the area and was not very familiar with the various players and intergroup dynamics. The experience as

a participant observer gave me a more intimate understanding of those dynamics and of the thoughts and sentiments of those within the community of residents, workers, and community organizers.

Through discussions about the problems facing youth, the history of the neighborhood, opinions about police, the problem of drugs and poverty, relations between social service agencies and community-based organizations, and myriad other issues, a more heterogeneous picture of the community emerged and the contexts within which social boundaries emerged became clearer. Though racial boundaries were highly salient throughout this time period, differences among those within the same racial boundaries became more pronounced as one became "close" enough to be let privy to those types of discussions. Being a participant observer, as opposed to simply an observer, was invaluable in gaining those insights.

One of the most difficult problems in conducting participant observation research in conflictual situations is the danger of being perceived as part of one group to the exclusion of others. Since it was important for me to understand as many points of view as possible, it was important that I not be perceived as "taking sides," whether it be on the side of any one racial group, agency, or social clique. Thus the choices of which activities to participate in and the extent of participation were made with this consideration. For as much as I might explain that I am taking no side other than peace, perceptions, as my dissertation attempts to show, are equally important as any set of intentions.

Because of the danger of being perceived as "siding" with one of any number of "sides," it was important to establish early contact with all parties in a short period of time. I tried to make an early assessment of the various parties and players involved and made as much effort as time permitted to establish dialogue and state my intentions as to the research project I was conducting. I was truthful in stating my interest in understanding the perspectives and positions of all groups and expressed my understanding of the difficulties in doing this given the polarization and factionalization within the neighborhood.

This was particularly tricky given the level of violence and suspicion involved given the circumstances of the gang war and policing of it. The fact that I was a woman and neither white, African American nor Latino were assets in some respects, given the fact that the main conflicts were between Latino and African American gangs and the LAPD, historically associated with the "white establishment." I might have been perceived as less threatening and less inclined to be biased or unduly influenced. I am unsure what specific impacts being Asian American had, but it was certainly different among different groups. For those residents who came to identify my ethnic background as a Japanese American and who had been close to some of the Japanese American families who lived in Venice,

there was a faster affinity reached, particularly among older residents who saw their Japanese American neighbors incarcerated in US internment camps during World War II. Others, however, did not make an ethnic distinction and tended to categorize me as being Asian; given that some resented business practices of Korean merchants on the Venice boardwalk, my being Asian posed some difficulty in establishing dialogue.

Thus, my racial and gender background, on one hand, gave me greater range in my contact with groups for the lack of any immediate outgroup or in-group identification and, on the other, made it difficult for me to gain fuller acceptance into any one racially- or gender-defined group. The approach of participant observer maximized the extent to which I could gain trust, at least among those with whom I worked and who appreciated any contribution I may have been able to make.

Interviews

Though I spoke informally to hundreds of people over the two-year period, formal interviews of one to three hours each were conducted with fifty-eight individuals from a range of backgrounds, roles and experiences. They spanned the gamut of government and non-profit agencies, gangs, community-based organizations, and residents who were involved with or related in some way to the gang war and the social conflicts surrounding it. The intention was to get a broad cross-section of perspectives and to try to understand the interactions between the multiple publics witnessing the events.

Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended to allow for flexibility through the course of discussion. Also interviews were semi-standard, with one set of questions which were usually asked of all interviewees with an additional set of questions which were specifically tailored to the interviewee based on organizational affiliations, nature of involvement, and other limited information about the individual prior to the interview. The core set of questions were designed to address three main questions: a) how they defined the problem; b) what solutions they prescribed; and c) how they interpreted the actions of various groups and d) how they described their own involvement. I also probed to find the larger narratives within which these explanations fit and to spot variations between individuals within the same formal organization so as to avoid homogenizing frames to the extent possible.

Individual personnel from the following government agencies were interviewed: Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles County Office of the District Attorney, Los Angeles County Probation Office, Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, Department of Justice office of Community Relations, and Office of Councilwoman Ruth Galanter. Individuals who worked with local community-based organizations and social service agencies included: Pearl White Theater, Community Service Organization,

Oakwood Property Owners Association, Oakwood Wesley House, Project Heavy West, Venice Historical Society, Santa Monica Chapter of the NAACP, Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Clinic, Oakwood United, and several local churches. Individuals from the V13 and Venice Shoreline Crips were interviewed. And individual residents with no stated organizational affiliations were also interviewed. Most of the formal interviews were recorded on audiotape.

In searching for people to formally interview, I selected interviewees based in part upon my theoretical framework. I tried to interview individuals who would represent the variety of identity group boundaries I was able to define in the discourse and was able to surmise from the empirical data available. Identity group boundaries were shaped by a number of factors such as race, gender, class and income level, age, length of residence, language, occupation, civic involvement, organizational affiliations, housing, parenthood, politics, religion, among many others. My intention was to get as much variation as that observed through my interactions with people who lived and worked in the affected neighborhood.

I did not try to get a sample which was proportionately representative of those affected by or involved in any way in the course of events. I only tried to capture the breadth of roles, experiences, and identity boundaries. Though I certainly did not capture them all in the sample, I feel fairly confident that the sample includes the main viewpoints and positions made explicit in the time period under study. Among the fifty-seven people formally interviewed, approximately one-third were women and two-thirds men. Eleven were Latino, twenty-eight were African American, seventeen were European American and one was Asian American, according to phenotypic categories of race. All were English-speaking and at least nine were bilingual in the Spanish language. Their age ranged from the early twenties to the early seventies. Approximately six fell between the ages of 18 to 29, thirteen age 50 and over, and the remaining were in their thirties and forties. Twenty-six of the fifty-seven were residents of Oakwood or Mar Vista and at least three lived in HUD-subsidized housing. Seventeen were parents with children who lived in the neighborhood. Seventeen worked full-time or part-time with a social service agency or school. They included counselors, teen workers, gang prevention workers, educators, childcare providers and community organizers. Sixteen were active members of community-based organizations, including resident organizations, neighborhood watch groups, youth groups, churches, historical associations, and the like. Four were members of the V-13 or the Venice Shoreline Crips. Eighteen worked with government agencies which responded to the outbreak of violence. Of those, thirteen were law enforcement

personnel and, of those thirteen, seven were officers or former officers with the Los Angeles Police Department.

Organization of chapters

I begin this dissertation with a brief literature review. There are two bodies of literature which address the problem of governance and racial conflict in diverse societies. One is the literature on ethnic and racial conflict, which I review in the next chapter. The second is the literature on governance in plural societies, which I reflect upon in the last chapter. In discussing the racial conflict literature in chapter 2, I build upon the existing theoretical concepts to propose the concept of “multiple publics” as a way to understand the shifting salience of identity group boundaries and the process by which social cleavages are reinforced or changed.

Chapter 3 presents a theory of social conflict based on the concept of multiple publics. It includes a discussion of associated concepts including identity formation, situational identity, interpretive frames and the shifting of group boundaries and social cleavages. Integral to this theoretical framework is the notion of power and the various techniques of power that publics may exert.

Chapter 4 provides a brief history and demographic profile of the Oakwood community. Venice and its Oakwood neighborhood has experienced many changes over the years--changes which have become part of the collective memories of its residents. The problem definitions within the community differ to quite an extent and can be better understood in an historic context. These differences among multiple publics both within and outside of the neighborhood both reflect and affect group interaction and race relations. Of particular significance was the formation of racial identity and race-based claims of justice and injustice.

In chapter 5, I discuss the *policy environment* within which the gang war erupted and law enforcement agencies responded. Law enforcement policies, particularly those related to gang-related crime, have generated heated controversy over the two decades leading up to the much debated Crime Bill that was signed into law in 1993. The policy environment is relevant to our understanding of law enforcement responses to the gang war and the impact of their actions intergroup relations for two reasons. First, the changes in the Crime Bill and other legislation increased the legal powers of law enforcement and criminal justice systems while the discourse surrounding their passage increased popular consent for their use. Implementation of policies had differential impacts for racial groups and reinforced the salience of racial group boundaries. Second, the controversies over crime and justice affected the responses among residents to law enforcement actions. The

degree to which residents, community activists, and others agreed with the dominant policies, practices, and philosophical underpinnings of those policies influenced their willingness or reluctance to work with law enforcement to end the fighting. The degree to which groups worked or appeared to work with law enforcement agents also affected the relations between them, as suspicions of collaboration with either gangs or police distanced groups and individuals.

In chapter 6, I will describe the process of racial polarization that was generated by the gang war and the difficulty it created for the facilitation of dialogue across color lines during that time. Conflicts that become racially polarized are particularly intractable because of the power of racially constructed and racially patterned differences that mark the landscape of our polity, economy, social structure, popular culture and lifestyles. Race as a socially constructed category maintains strong currency due to its historic role and to the fact that racial segregation in many arenas of society remain. Though class and income weigh heavily on patterns of social segregation, inequality and separation along racially defined categories persist despite claims of its declining significance. Subsequently, racialized conflicts between groups who are or perceive themselves to be in subordinate positions by virtue of racial subjugation, have the potential of polarizing along racial lines despite the existence of crosscutting boundaries such as class or gender. I will illustrate this phenomenon as it unfolded in the gang war in Venice.

Law enforcement agents took two different approaches in response to the conflict. The approaches can be termed a police-led "firefighter" approach and a network-based "mediation" approach. The former was characterized by search and seizure operations with heavy police patrolling and the latter characterized by the facilitation of dialogue between conflicting gangs. Chapters 7 and 8 are devoted to these two approaches respectively.

Chapter 7 chronicles the rationale, implementation and effect of the "high-suppression" approach. In contrast, chapter 8 focuses on the "mediation" approach and similarly illustrates its implementation and effects. I discuss the complexity of issues involved in formulating a network-based strategy, however loosely aligned and happenstance. The ability to see the problem from the vantage point of multiple publics--to be multi-focal, if you will--was a critical skill which enabled a network of individuals to package disparate efforts into some semblance of a strategy for peace. Chapter 9 concludes with a discussion of the application of the concept of multiple publics that may be useful for practitioners addressing similar conflicts elsewhere.

The lessons from this case study may provide useful insights into the broader issue of group processes and governance in multicultural and pluralistic societies. Different groups with different histories, cultural practices, interpretive lenses, languages and

dialects, socioeconomic positions, economic interests, religious beliefs, techniques of power, and ideological convictions can come to see the world in very different ways. If we accept that social realities are constructed, that they are particular to a certain time and place, that multiple meanings are imputed to objects and social phenomena, that actions and events are read through contrasting interpretive frames, that there are many different realities which coexist in the same time and space, and that power is inseparable from a base of knowledge and invested through a range of techniques undermining traditional forms of social control, then how are we to govern ourselves under a single democracy? How do we manage our differences? When it comes to public policy, how are we to weigh conflicting values and other considerations among multiple publics? What are the implications of the concept of multiple publics for the policymaking process?

We have not yet been able to eliminate inequalities and prejudices which impose divisions between groups nor have we devised ways to allow for the free expression of group differences and yet share the same institutions of governance. While this study does not portend to answer these far-reaching questions of governance in culturally and otherwise diverse societies, it is my hope that the conceptual tools derived from this study may give us more clarity in order to more effectively address these issues of governance and the growing problem of urban interracial conflict in the US.

¹ Martinez, Marilyn. "Deadly Venice gang war turns to race war: Police see violence in Venice widening." *Venice-Marina News*, 25 November 1993. (Reprinted from the *Outlook*)

² Many have publicly voiced complaints that violence in minority communities has received inadequate government action and has generated disappointing levels of public outcry. The question of why gang violence in exclusively minority communities went on with less attention from government agencies and the media is a legitimate one. This question is partially answered here, but a fuller explanation is beyond the scope of this study.

³ Starr, Kevin. "Violence in utopia: What the Venice gang killings mean to LA," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 1994, M-1.

⁴ According to interviews with various police officers, reports of interracial gang violence increased in the early 1990s. In Long Beach, for example, Latino gangs found themselves at war with Cambodian gangs while in Pomona, African American gangs and Latino gangs fought heated battles.

CHAPTER 2

RACIAL CONFLICT: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the way we have problematized the phenomenon of racial and ethnic conflict reflects the compartmentalization of intellectual disciplines often isolating the economic, social, political, and cultural realms of inquiry. Lost is a clearer understanding of the interrelations between these realms of life. This review of the literature on ethnic and racial conflict reflects these disciplinary divides but is also presented in an attempt to make interdisciplinary linkages in order to lay the foundation for a more interdisciplinary theoretical discussion of social relations to follow. In this chapter, I begin with a review of the literature on racial and ethnic conflict. In the following chapter, I present my conceptual framework of multiple publics which draws from this critique of existing theories across the various disciplines.

This collective body of literature can be categorized into three main schools of thought. One is the broad category of *structural theories*, into which I include assimilation, class and competition theories of conflict. The second category falls within the domain of psychology and includes *social psychological theories* of intergroup behavior as they relate to race and ethnic boundaries. And the third paradigmatic set of inquiries adopts a *social constructionist* approach to the study of conflict, emphasizing the narrative discourses which frame the interpretations of social phenomena and group interaction. I will outline the major theoretical arguments and contributions within each school as well as state their limitations.

I should qualify this section by stating that I recognize that there is a difference between racial and ethnic conflict¹ and between conflict in “advanced” industrialized nations and less industrial ones.² I have included theoretical works dealing with all of the above for my purpose of culling the variables which scholars have identified as shaping intergroup relations along a variety of social cleavages. In so doing, it is not my intention to trivialize the differences which do exist between these categories, but only to cast a wide net in search of applicable concepts.

Structuralist theories of conflict

Assimilation, class, and competition theories of racial or ethnic conflict attribute the greatest source of conflict to social, economic and political structures which bring groups into social discord. Structuralist theories share basic assumptions of positivist,

rational choice paradigms which view human behavior as self-interest maximizing. When placed within structural constraints which delineate interest groups along racial or ethnic boundaries, this self-interest maximizing behavior of individuals and social organizations fuels racial or ethnic conflict.

Assimilation theories of racial conflict - Assimilation theories articulated by Robert Park (1950) and Milton Gordon (1964) were a departure from previously discredited theories of primordial group conflict in that they rejected the notion that innate differences would preclude the racial or ethnic "melting" of peoples and cultures. They and other assimilation theorists, notably those associated with the Chicago school of sociology in the 1950s, proposed a normative view of American society as one in which ethnic and racial differences would subside over time as immigrants and their descendants would assimilate into the culture, polity, and economy of US society. Racial and ethnic conflicts were seen as primarily a problem of race prejudice during periods of migration and subsequent social adjustment, since the structural mechanisms for assimilation in a democratic America were assumed to accommodate immigrants. Racial and ethnic conflicts, then, were a temporary phenomenon until which time the assimilation process was complete.

There were three major flaws in assimilation theory as initially articulated, to which scholars and social activists presented revised frameworks. One was the normative assumption that immigrants would or should adopt to the cultural norms and systems established by European groups. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (1963) were among those who argued for a pluralist vision of America, one in which different cultural norms and practices can coexist in a potpourri rather than a melting pot. A second flaw was the lack of a more thorough critique of power relations between white and non-white racial groups. Neither assimilationist nor pluralist theories were seen to adequately consider the consequences of unequal power relations on racial or ethnic relations and the persistence of group identity as a function of differential status and techniques of power. And third, they tended to assume that non-white *racial* groups would chart a pattern of assimilation similar to that of white *ethnic* groups before them. They could not explain the persistence of deep racial barriers to assimilation.

Class-based critiques of racial conflict - Scholars and social activists proposed more radical class critiques of American society in response to assimilation theories.³ From this body of literature, three major explanations of racial conflict were proposed: class domination, split labor market, and middleman minority theories.

The first arose from an orthodox Marxist paradigm which viewed racial conflict as a form of class struggle between an ethnically or racially distinct bourgeoisie and proletariat. Tailored to the US context, Blauner (1972), Hechter (1975) and others proposed the internal colonialism theory. Racial minorities were analyzed as subjects of European American colonial rule where land ownership, language, the distribution of rights and privileges, and cultural norms and values were in the control of the white power structure. Conflict was explained in terms of oppression and resistance, as racial minorities in the US were seen to fight for their liberation from European colonialist domination within the womb of the colonial power itself. Racial conflict was analyzed as an outgrowth of the struggle for domination by white elites, on one hand, and liberation by minority laborers on the other.

This orthodox interpretation, however, did not explain the deep divisions which existed between workers of different racial and ethnic groups, particularly the hostilities between white and non-white workers throughout labor history. Some neo-Marxists answered with a Gramscian notion of false consciousness. They argued that the hegemonic power of the bourgeoisie over the cultural realm resulted in a mistaken belief promoted by the ruling class that true divisions did indeed exist between workers of different ethnic backgrounds. The bourgeoisie was seen to systematically perpetuate racial or ethnic division in the interest of capital accumulation and worker exploitation (Baran and Sweezy 1966, Reich 1971, Blauner 1972).

A second explanation of racial conflict within the working class was the *split labor market theory* proposed by Edna Bonacich. This theory states that racial and ethnic conflict among workers is a result of a segmented labor market characterized by differential wages and job opportunities. Jobs and wages are parceled by white capitalists according to racial or ethnic group membership and the unequal distribution of both create group antagonisms.⁴ She also offers a second explanation of racial and ethnic conflict between different class strata in the post-colonial era of transnational labor and capital flows. She terms this the *middleman minority thesis* in which she posits that racial and ethnic conflict results from the monopoly of entrepreneurial niches by one ethnic group to the exclusion of others. This creates resentments among capitalists, ethnic entrepreneurs, and wage laborers, as ethnic entrepreneurs are the target of resentment by both larger capitalists with whom they compete and workers who are barred entry into the respective entrepreneurial sectors.

While assimilation and pluralist theories are based on political theories of liberal democracy in which the prescribed role of government is to secure the expression of individual preferences in the polity and the free market, Marxist and neo-Marxist paradigms view the state as an agent of social control in the service of the ruling class. Thus, according to Marxist and neo-Marxist paradigms, government institutions, such as the courts, police, and welfare agencies, are often designed to promote racial divisions which can hinder worker solidarity and facilitate the subjugation of labor. The state is not an autonomous actor, nor is it the object of class conflict, but rather, an apparatus by which those who own the means of production maintain their control.

Marxist and neo-Marxist explanations of racial conflict are contingent on unequal power relations based on class divisions. While the insights into the relationship between class interests and power are useful for the study of inter-minority group conflict in the US, there are several limitations of this body of theoretical literature. One limitation arises in cases of inter-minority group conflict where racial divisions are not directly connected to segmentation in the labor market or to unequal power relations based on class composition. Inter-minority group conflict often occurs between groups, neither of which dominates one another in the class structure nor monopolizes a particular entrepreneurial niche or segment of the labor market. In the Los Angeles case under study, for example, the socioeconomic distribution of Blacks and Latinos in conflict fits neither the segmented labor market nor the middleman minority models.

A second limitation concerns the role of the state. Institutional critiques of Marxist theories of the state have noted the discontinuities between class interests and state powers; not all state institutions are in the capture of ruling class interests. In fact, institutionalists argue that the state can be seen as a maze of semi-autonomous institutional actors within which class and a variety of other forces may operate (Koelbe 1995, Searing 1991). The actions of police in response to the gang war, for example, cannot be understood solely as in the direct service of capital. The policies and practices of specific government agencies are not only influenced by powerful class interests, but also by a broad range of factors attributable to the bureaucratic structures, norms, values, guidelines, and idiosyncrasies of the institutions themselves, the policy environment within which agencies function, and politics shaping the behavior of individuals within institutions.

Competition theories of ethnic and racial conflict - Competition theories overcome some of these limitations of class-based theories. Competition theories can be

said to have their early roots in ecological theories of social adaptation from which assimilation theory and modernization theory both derive. Modernization theories were developed to explain ethnic conflict in non-industrialized nations. Simply put, the argument was made that modernization--including industrialization, urbanization and political shifts towards the development of nation-states--changed the social, economic, and political structures which, in turn, altered the form and level of social and political mobilization. Rather than smaller-scale movements based on tribal group or village, for example, ethnicity became the more salient level of group identity and mobilization (Eisenstadt and Rokkan 1973, Tilly 1986). Ethnic movements accompanied by intensified competition between groups were analyzed as a primary source of ethnic conflict (Nagel and Olzak 1982, Nielson 1985).

More general theories of ethnic competition and conflict have been developed and applied to conflict in industrialized nations as well as the non-industrialized world. Barth (1956, 1969) was an influential figure in refocusing discussions of ethnicity from a concern over its characteristics to the forces which shape its boundaries. He proposed that ethnic conflict can arise in cases of competition between ethnic groups over the same valued resources, particularly when rival groups are in an equally powerful position to overcome the other and do not choose to voluntarily accommodate the other group. Olzak (1992) extends this argument to the study of racial conflict in the US., adding the qualification that groups come into conflict when they compete in niches which overlap between them. ⁵

Competition theory is very useful in understanding contemporary racial conflict. There are discrepancies, however, that competition theories do not adequately address. Potential adversaries may not always pursue a course of conflict, whether because of fear of outcomes, a view of existing distribution of resources as legitimate (Coser 1968) or for reasons attributable to cultural norms and practices.⁶ While competition over resources or opportunities are often at the center of conflict, not all participants of a particular conflict are necessarily in direct competitive relations. Nor is it always in the interest of all members of a particular racial or ethnic group to mobilize along those cleavages in support of individuals who are in direct competition with another group. And while some conflicts may begin over competition for resources and opportunities, those "goods" may not remain the point of contention over time (Coleman 1957). Some of these inconsistencies between theory and evidence have been the focus of theoretical works in the fields of psychology and cultural studies.

Social psychological theories of intergroup conflict

There is a long history of research on racial and ethnic conflict under the more general rubric of intergroup behavior⁷ within the discipline of psychology.⁸ Though too numerous to review in detail, there are several mid-range theories which address some of the major shortcomings of structuralist theories and provide useful insights on the following topics: (a) group cohesion in conflict settings; (b) social identity and sense of self-worth; and (c) the shifting of group divisions along salient identity boundaries.

As mentioned previously, competition theories have not been able to adequately explain the spread of conflict beyond the scope of those in direct competition with one another. Interestingly, social psychologists have identified various factors affecting the escalation of conflict as characterized by two measures: (1) the increase in group cohesion displayed by members of the ingroup in their behavior and attitudes toward an outgroup and (2) the decrease in variability in the characteristics and behavior of the members of the outgroup as they are perceived by members of the ingroup (Tajfel 1981, 1982). On the first measure, psychological theories have attempted to identify the factors which influence the degree of group cohesion. These include the perceived "interdependence of fate" within or between groups (Lewin 1948, Rabbie 1971), numerical balance between group populations (greater ingroup favoritism among minority groups) (see Brewer & Miller 1984), status position (greater ingroup bias among lower status groups) (Commins and Lockwood 1979a, 1979b), the anticipated outcomes for the ingroup of the outgroup's actions (Horowitz and Rabbie 1982), ease of moving from one group to another⁹ (Tajfel), and the scope and range of ethnocentrism (Tajfel 1981).¹⁰

The second measure characterizing conflict is degree to which adversarial groups tend to see the 'other' as more homogenous or as acting in a more uniform pattern of behavior, regardless of the amount of difference and disagreement which may, in fact, exist. Thus, actions on the part of a few members or images presented by select individuals can be read to represent that of the group as a whole, particularly when there is greater social distance between them. The degree of internal group cohesion and the degree to which groups view the other as homogeneous affect the intensity of intergroup conflict.

Several social psychologists have also attempted to address a second shortfall of competition and, more generally, rational choice-based theories in their distinction

between "realistic competition" and "social competition." Like other rational choice-based theory, realistic group conflict theory¹¹ in social psychology emphasized the "real" or material group interests around which conflict occurred. Turner (1975), however, made a distinction between what was termed "realistic competition" and what he called "social competition."¹² This was particularly important, since the intensity of group conflict did not always correspond to the degree of in-group identification associated with competition nor did conflicts always involve conflicts of interest over things we might consider materially tangible. Social competition can take place over "goods" such as rank, status, reputation or other socially defined qualities.

In this vein, Tajfel and Turner (1986) hypothesize that social identity processes¹³ can become a source of intergroup conflict, particularly when efforts to establish a favorable social identity are thwarted. They posit three social functions of social categorization processes that allow for the escalation of intergroup conflict: a) the justification of actions planned or committed against outgroups; b) perception of social causality, especially as it relates to large-scale events whose complexity needs to be reduced to simpler proportions; and c) a positive differentiation of one's own social group from relevant outgroups (Tajfel 1981). The process of social categorization fed by the "desire" for a positive self-identity offers one explanation to the escalation of conflicts beyond the scope and boundaries of contests as would be predicted by previously outlined theories.

Donald Horowitz combines many of these concepts in social psychology in his seminal work, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985). He argues that rational-choice based competition theories alone cannot explain the types and intensity of ethnic conflict witnessed throughout many parts of the world.¹⁴ Horowitz argues that ethnic conflict emerges from the politics of group entitlement, which itself is a joint function of competition for a favorable evaluation of their group worth (moral) and struggle for group legitimacy in the realm of the political system. He believes that ethnic ties in many non-industrialized nations fulfill the needs of dependency and intimacy, similar to those filled by kinship ties, particularly in times of stress, stating that "the ethnic tie is simultaneously suffused with overtones of familial duty and laden with depths of familial emotion" (Horowitz 1985, p. 60).

While the process of social categorization and the desire for a positive self-identity may help fill some of the theoretical gaps in understanding the expansion in the scope of conflicts and its shifting character, "familial emotion" as a major explanation

for the tenacity of, in Horowitz's case, ethnic boundaries raises yet more questions as to the centrality of some group boundaries over others. Are ethnic boundaries necessarily more salient relative to others? Why do some conflicts broaden or narrow from, say, ethnic or class cleavages to racial or gender cleavages? In fact, racial and ethnic conflicts are usually bound and intertwined with other salient identity boundaries and involve more complex group dynamics than a more static and unidimensional definition of the groups implies. The broadening scope of conflicts and shifting character of group cleavages point to a critical question in the study of racial and ethnic conflict. That is, how do we account for and conceptualize the apparent shifts among a multiplicity of identity group boundaries?

There are multiple identity group boundaries--such as race, class, gender, religion, ideological belief, and institutional affiliation--by which individuals identify themselves in relation to other people and to events around them. These identity group boundaries vary in their degree of salience, centrality, and interdependence in any given situation (Okamura 1981, Hofman 1988). Due to historical reasons, ethnicity, race and class can be said to have a particularly high degree of centrality in intergroup relations in the US. Conflicts or controversies, from the level of neighborhood tiff to national policy debate, can involve or gain the attention of multiple publics defined by any combination of salient group boundaries. These emergent publics have contrasting interpretive frames by which they read, analyze, and respond to events and actions in a conflict or controversy. Conflict and controversy can lead to *racial* division or polarization if *racial* cleavages become the most salient identity group boundary along which a conflict escalates. The media often plays a powerful role in how conflicts are defined and, subsequently, how lines of division are reinforced or changed.

Tajfel (1981) defines social identity as "that part of individuals' self concept which derives from knowledge of their membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 255). Hofman (1988) argues that subidentities form specific links between the self and membership in groups and can vary in salience, valence, centrality, multiplexity, and interdependence. Under different circumstances, different subidentities "switch on" (Turner 1982) and become salient. Prolonged salience enhances its centrality among subidentities. Hofman (1988) notes that when conflicts occur, "individuals are willingly committed to such a conflict only to the extent that relevant subidentities are engaged.... Sometimes, commitment is situationally specific (and) what looks like inconsistency, or

even insincerity, is a consequence of situational salience and multifaceted identity" (p. 94). In other words, the salience of identity group boundaries can vary according to the situation, and the relative salience among various subidentities can affect one's commitment to a particular conflict or cause.

Power and status differentials can influence the relative salience of various identities (Ng 1980). Psychologists have conducted various experimental studies on the effects of power and status differentials on intergroup relations. These studies show an increase in in-group favoritism in controlled experiments in which status differentials were deemed illegitimate (see Tajfel 1982). This indicates an increased salience of identity group boundaries between groups of unequal status and power in nations where there is, at least in theory, a commitment to equal rights for all its citizens. Power differentials can increase the salience of racial, ethnic, class, and gender group boundaries along which differentials in power, status, or opportunity are most apparent. Power and status differences can deepen social cleavages where those inequalities can be seen as inconsistent with formal rights and privileges.

Groups may define themselves in relation to others, but how groups make intergroup distinctions and why groups arrive at certain definitions of themselves remains unexplained. One definition of "other," for example, may instill fear and trepidation while another may lead to assimilation and mutual cooperation. What is the process by which groups arrive at these constructs? And how can we explain differences within ethnic groups between those which promote conflict and those which promote cooperative relations with other groups? Some of these questions concerning the construction of racial meanings have begun to emerge in the recent literature on US urban race relations in the post-sixties industrial cities.

Social construction and racial conflict

Many scholars have noted the changing texture of urban race and ethnic relations in the 1980s and 1990s. A new body of literature is presently emerging, with broad characteristics which can be summarized as follows: (1) a recognition of the multi-racial and multi-ethnic character of race relations; (2) a focus on neighborhood and community-based case studies; (3) an attempt to combine social, cultural, and structural explanations of racial and ethnic conflict; (4) greater differentiation of conflict types based on the specificity of the ethnic and racial groups involved; and (5) a wider

recognition of multiple realities based on different lenses and meanings placed upon group experiences.

There is no question that the "Black-White" paradigm is an inadequate model for race relations in the new urban environs of the multicultural city (Chang 1993, Falcon 1988, Freer 1995, Jennings 1992, Park 1996, Waters 1992). Even as early as the sixties, ethnic studies scholars and activists had raised criticism of the dichotomous nature of this paradigm for failing to capture the experiences of non-Black minorities such as Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans in urban settings. More recently, renewed scholarly attention has been paid to understanding the multiple group relations affecting our nation's larger cities.¹⁵

Beginning in the early nineties, a substantial number of case studies of urban racial and ethnic conflict were published. These case studies looked at cases of conflict which took place in a specific city or locality. Studies were conducted on conflicts among Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Los Angeles, among Cuban refugees and Haitian Americans in Miami, and among various racial, religious, and ethnic groups in New York City, to name a few. Some of these case studies focus on cases involving subtle tensions, while others focus on more visible manifestations of ethnic conflict and cooperation (Baldesarre 1994, Chang 1994, Espiritu 1992, Freer 1994, Harris 1994, Hero 1989, Horton 1995, Jennings and Lusane 1994, Lamphere 1992, Lott 1994, Park 1996, Saito 1993, Umemoto 1994, Waters 1992, Yun 1993). These case studies represent a significant contribution to the growing body of empirical data on urban conflict in multi-racial cities.

Most of these studies combine structural, social, and cultural explanations of conflict. A major difference between them appear to be two-fold: a) the primacy given to the various types of explanatory factors and b) the interrelationships between structural, social, and cultural modes of interaction.¹⁶ Most agree that structural factors, such as the structure of economic and political institutions, play an important role in patterning race and ethnic relations, but several have focused new inquiry on the construction of social meanings which, given structural and other considerations, shape the outcome of interactions which, while commonly fraught with conflict, involve a richer and more complex dynamic.¹⁷

This dynamic involves the multiplicity of perceptions by which different groups "see" the unfolding of events and the interpretive frames through which groups make meaning of others' actions. For the specific histories, legacies, cultures, and conditions

which make groups distinct are also those very differences that lead to the creation of multiple realities. In Waters' case study of four racially-charged incidents of violence in New York City, she concludes that racial incidents "can be seen from different perspectives, each of which is equally legitimate and real to the particular groups of participants" (Waters 1992, p. 58). These "multiple realities" coexist in the same time and place and therefore lead to skewed interactions, only understood through the eyes of each beholder. Umemoto's (1994) analysis of news coverage of a shooting death of an African American girl by a Korean merchant in Los Angeles by two ethnic newspapers found that the Korean and African American press revealed very different interpretations of events and outcomes. This does not mean that there is no factual reality, but it does reinforce the argument that there are interpretive lenses or frames through which facts can be selectively viewed and diversely interpreted. Mach (1993) refers to these interpretive lenses or frames as "cognitive models." He states that cultural groups contain these "cognitive models" of the world which are built of symbolic forms and "organize people's experience and express relations between groups." (1993, p. x)¹⁸

The rich body of literature only partially reviewed here provide useful insights and conceptual tools to study contemporary social conflict along multiple lines of cleavage as well as social group formation along multiple identity boundaries. In the next chapter, I will draw upon these in an effort to develop the notion of "multiple publics" and present a conceptual model for understanding the dynamics of intergroup conflict among multiple publics.

¹For the purposes of this study, ethnic group distinctions are those defined along cultural distinctions as compared to racial group categories which are defined by phenotypical features, primarily skin color. The two types of group formation are themselves interrelated, as phenotypical differences have shaped the cultural milieu and the phenotypical distinctions are themselves cultural constructions.

² Several scholars including Horowitz (1983) have argued for a separation of the discussion of ethnic conflict in less industrialized nations from the discussion of racial conflict within the US based on the argument that the democratic structure characteristic of advanced industrial nations avert the type of ethnic strife found in less industrialized nations.

³For a review of class-based theories of racial conflict, see Bonacich (1980).

⁴White workers, for example, when given higher wages and greater opportunities for mobility are both privileged above other workers and, at the same time, are threatened by the potential gain among those below on the racial hierarchy. The use of minority workers as strikebreakers often sparks racial conflict based on competition within a segmented labor market.

⁵Olzak argues that while modernization may have served as a catalyst for ethnic mobilization in non-industrialized nations, she argues that in the industrialized US, it was breakdown of ethnic inequalities and racially ordered systems that intensified competition and sparked conflict. She cites migration and immigration, economic contraction, dispersion from niches, and increasing prosperity for disadvantaged ethnic groups as four processes instrumental in raising levels of ethnic and racial competition.

⁶ Existing theories tend to have a higher degree of predictability in some countries more than in others. Even within a single nation-state, there is variance in the occurrence of conflict across groups, regions,

and historical epochs. This would suggest that there are other factors such as cultural norms would cause some groups to avoid conflict and other groups to pursue it. Alternatively, social meanings read into a situation may differ between groups in that same predicament which would lead to a varied set of responses, including, but not necessarily engagement in conflict.

⁷For a definition of intergroup behavior, numerous scholars have referred to Sherif (1967, p. 62) who stated that it is "any behavior displayed by one or more actors toward one or more others that is based on the actors' identification of themselves and the others as belonging to different social categories."

⁸For reviews of psychological theories of intergroup relations, including explanations of conflict, see Brewer and Kramer (1985), Condor and Brown (1988), Tajfel (1982), Turner (1984).

⁹Conflict along racial categories, for example, since based on phenotypical characteristics, tend to be more intense than along boundaries more easily traversed.

¹⁰Sumner (1906) stated that "exigencies of war with outsiders are what makes peace inside." (p. 12), but there remains debate over the extent to which external conflict creates internal cohesion relative to the degree to which other factors mentioned, especially in the absence of intense conflict such as war (see Tajfel 1982).

¹¹"Realistic group conflict theory" was a term coined by Donald T. Campbell (1965) and marked a departure from prior research which focused on patterns of individual prejudices and discrimination. These include theories of the authoritarian personality, frustration-aggression theory, and other motivational aspects of interpersonal behavior. Muzafer Sherif and his associates were known for their advancement of "realistic group conflict theory." The latter includes scarce values and goods such as income, status, power, territorial dominion or economic niche. He argues that they need to be analyzed separately from dispositions and attitudes.

¹²A similar distinction is made by Coser (1968) who refers to "subjective" and "objective" bases of conflict.

¹³This work is an updated version of an earlier chapter published in the original edition (1979) of this book in which they propose a theory of "categorization-identity-comparison." The basic theoretical principles are summarized as follows: (1) Individuals strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity, (2) based largely on favorable comparisons with other groups. However when social identity is unsatisfactory, (3) individuals will try to leave their group for a more favorable one or make their group more positively distinct (Tajfel and Turner 1986, p. 16).

¹⁴Horowitz's observations of ethnic conflict in non-industrialized nations corresponded with Henri Tajfel's experimental findings that groups often make decisions which will increase their *relative advantage* over another group, even if such a decision would result in a lesser *net gain* for their group overall.

¹⁵For example, a major Ford Foundation study marked a growing concern among policy makers regarding the relations between newcomers and established residents in urban areas (Bach 1993; see also Lamphere 1992). This corresponded with the increasing occurrence of racially-charged outbreaks of crime and urban violence which caught public attention during the late eighties and early nineties.

¹⁶Several works which lend greater weight to institutional relations in their theoretical treatment of the causes of conflict are Lamphere's (1992) work on the role of "mediating institutions" that hierarchically organize intergroup relations and Oliver and Johnson's (1984) emphasis on the role of institutions in maintaining inequality and segregation in Los Angeles. In contrast, others acknowledge structural factors in the historical development of intergroup relations, and focus on the way in which meanings are attached to interactions through historically-bound lenses shaped by group experiences (Waters 1992, Park 1996). Park (1995) highlights the role of media discourse in the production of racial meanings and definitions of "self" and "other." Still others, such as Stewart (19xx) focus on differences in language and communication styles as they contribute to misunderstanding and conflict between Blacks and Koreans.

¹⁷One of the collective contributions of the emerging number of case studies is their differentiation of different types of conflicts. Waters (1992), for example, argues that it is important to distinguish the groups in conflict by their mode of incorporation. She uses John Ogbu's distinction between voluntary and involuntary minorities--those who came to the US on their free will as opposed to those brought by slave traders and labor contractors or indigenous groups who were conquered on their own territory. The modes of incorporation affect the formation of identity, the group's relationship to the state, and the meanings attached to events and encounters. Additionally, many recent studies make distinctions

between actions and responses of immigrants in contrast to native-born participants within the same ethnic or racial group. The specific characteristics of groups, such as their mode of incorporation, nativity, language, gender, race or ethnicity, have significant bearing on the type and intensity of conflict. The group specificities, along with more generalized historical conditions, in tandem provide the context for understanding intergroup relations.

¹⁸See also Anita Waters (1985) who employs this approach in her analysis of symbols and their meanings in a case study of Jamaican electoral politics.

CHAPTER 3

MULTIPLE PUBLICS AND SOCIAL CONFLICT

In this chapter, I will present a theory of social conflict based on the concept of multiple publics. The use of “multiple publics” as a unit of analysis is a departure from previous studies of racial and ethnic conflict in which groups are defined by a singular identity group boundary such as race or ethnicity. The concept of multiple publics acknowledges that individuals have multiple identities and that different combinations of identity group boundaries may be salient in any given situation. Race, while a highly central identity group boundary for many in US society, may be the primary category of identification in a given situation relative to other group boundaries but in other situations may not be. Understanding that group formation may change from situation to situation along different combinations of identity markers, we can understand the dynamics of intergroup conflict in a more nuanced and useful way. The application of these concepts can aid us in understanding the complexity of conflict and can help us better identify points of intervention for their mediation or resolution.¹

This theoretical framework grew out of the empirical study of the Venice case as much as any framework led my inquiry. The “Roshomon” phenomenon where different groups of actors had different accounts of the same events coupled with the shifting lines of group divisions demanded a new way of understanding intergroup conflict. The multiple identities of individuals and patterns of group cohesion and separation over the changing course of events underlined the complexity of conflict in contemporary society. The evolution of the sources of conflict as perceived by warring parties also highlighted the socially defined nature of conflicts. Publics and problems were defined in iterations and it was in these iterations that the trajectory of conflict and the evolution of social relations were revealed. It was also in these iterations that transpublics identified opportunities for the resolution of conflict and the creation of constructive dialogue as much as they were possible. So while armed with theoretical concepts from the literature, the framework presented here also emerged in the attempt to critically understand and observe the phenomenon.

This chapter is organized into three parts. In the first part, I discuss the notion of multiple publics and the major concepts associated with it, including situational identity and identity formation, frames and interpretation, and the shifting of group boundaries and social cleavages. Second, I will discuss the uses and techniques of

power as conceived in this framework. And third, I will outline ways in which this framework may suggest points of intervention and ways in which policies and interventions can either exacerbate conflict or facilitate more constructive and participatory processes towards resolution or understanding.

Publics as a unit of group formation

Groups which can be defined as sharing common identity group boundaries and accompanying "interpretive frames" can be described as forming distinct "publics."² I use the term "publics" as distinct from the term "groups" based on a conceptual difference in which I emphasize: 1) the fluid and shifting nature of group formation along various identity group boundaries, 2) depending on individuals' rankings and meanings of those things (people, places, moments, experiences, symbols) with which they identify in specific situations and 3) the oftentimes different interpretations that publics may have of the same phenomenon.

Publics connote less static entities which can emerge and recede and which can shift in composition over changing circumstances. For example, a neighborhood may be organized or factionalized along class and racial boundaries in relation to the problem of crime, while the same neighborhood can be divided along the lines of property ownership (owners versus renters) in relation to the issue of housing covenants. On the other hand race, property ownership, and class boundaries may intersect, defining several groups and sub-groups that may mobilize for or against urban renewal. Multiple publics can be used to understand the formation of collectives which read and act upon problems from distinct vantage points--vantage points which lend themselves to differing interpretations of phenomena.

Publics, in this sense, transcend formal organizational group boundaries, though they may oftentimes concur with them in situations where the combination of salient identity group boundaries coincide with that of an organization's membership. It is useful to distinguish publics from formal organizations, particularly in the study of conflict, as it is often the case that there are differences among members within organizations and publics transcend organizational boundaries. Publics can be mobilized or often do mobilize despite organizational ties or constraints. Likewise, formal organizational positions may not always reflect the opinions of a group's membership.

Publics often have different sets of concerns and interests. They share differing interpretive frameworks through which they analyze the same events. And they may share different values and priorities by which they make judgment of a situation. They are the formal and informal groups that emerge to peer more closely at a social phenomenon and which gravitate around particular viewpoints based on the arousal of salient identity group boundaries. Publics which gather along salient markers of identification in connection to a phenomenon, then, can be said to experience a distinct reality from their respective vantage points. A major assumption here is that there exist not only "interests" as defined in positivistic terms, but also multiple views of reality upon which publics define themselves and their shared concerns. As Waters (1992) argues, group interpretations are mediated through cultural lenses shaped by their historical experiences in the US.³ These cultural lenses mediate the attachment of meaning to events, categories and symbols.

Situational identity

An important concept in understanding multiple publics is the idea of "situational identity." This is similar to the concept of "situational *ethnicity*."⁴ The basic premise of situational ethnicity is that 'particular contexts may determine which of a person's communal identities or loyalties are appropriate at a point in time' (Paden 1970:268, cited in Okamura 1981). Ethnicity, by this definition, does not represent a static category based on a constant of cultural characteristics, but rather denotes a set of boundaries which are both structurally and socially constructed (Barth 1969, Despres 1975). The variability in the affirmation of ethnic identities, however, is situationally specific (Okamura 1981). Like situational ethnicity, the more generic concept of situational identity can be similarly understood.

Situational identity can be analyzed along two dimensions: structural and cognitive (Okamura 1981). The *structural* dimension refers to the overall structure of group relations including the political, economic, and social norms and institutions which restrain or privilege different groups. While the structural features of US society are relatively more permeable to assimilation than in caste societies, patterns of inequality along racial, gender and class boundaries remain embedded in the cultural norms and institutional settings within which groups interact. The relevance of race and other group boundaries varies, in part, by the degree to which these norms and institutions pattern social relations according to those social categories.

The *cognitive* dimension of situational ethnicity refers to individuals' perception of a given situation and the relevance one places on ethnicity or race in that situation. While ethnicity may not be relevant for some in a particular situation, it may be very meaningful for others in that same situation. Likewise, while some may argue that ethnicity or race has become less significant as a factor affecting life chances of individuals in this society, the truth lies in the eyes of the beholder. For the purpose of understanding intergroup dynamics, how an individual perceives structural constraints is as valid as the actual constraints themselves. The relevance that individuals place on ethnic, racial, or other identity markers is dependent upon the perceptions an individual holds in a particular situation.

These two aspects of situational identity⁵ distinguish between the degree to which identity is imposed by forces external to a group of individuals and the degree to which its construction and salience originate from among a group of individuals, though the two aspects cannot be completely separated. In Thomas Eriksen's words, ethnic identities "are wedged between situational selection and imperatives imposed from without" (Eriksen 1993, p. 57). Each contributes to the variability in the degree of salience of particular identity group boundaries and to the pattern of group formation.

The salience of race - Race is one of many identity group boundaries which are both imposed and embraced.⁶ Gender, class, ancestral origin, sexual preference, religion, occupation, and educational attainment represent other identity markers which hold much meaning in our society. There has long been debate over the meaning of race and its persistence as a delineating feature of social relations in the US. Recent scholarly works have analyzed race as a socially constructed concept defined historically along physical characteristics and associated with meanings concerning group worth, behavior, standing, attitudes, norms, values, privileges, and specific group attributes. The notion of race has been described by Omi and Winant (1994) as a product of "racial formation" involving a "process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings" (Omi and Winant 1986, p. 61). Race, according to this view, is not a biological attribute but a sociohistorical construct that has been embedded in the popular imagination and is integral to the maintenance of the social order. The content of racial categories -- what race has come to mean -- is a product of social processes and political contests.

Race has been a central feature of American social relations since the nation's founding. Its contemporary meaning is rooted in its colonial history. The conquest of Native American lands, the enslavement of Africans, the conquest of the Southwest territory, the annexation of Alaska, Puerto Rico, Hawai'i and other Pacific island nations, and the importation of contract labor from Asia were central to the establishment of the US as a nation state. The colonial period continued into the early 20th century, during which time racially and ethnically explicit laws and restrictions were strictly enforced. These formal institutions enforcing racial hierarchies were formed in tandem with cultural and ideological notions of racial superiority and inferiority. Many of these notions of race -- including religious, moral, and genetic rationales for racial separation - - persist in various forms and in various segments of society.

The fact that racial categorization is based on phenotypic or physical features contributes to its centrality in the formation of identity and social relations. Features signifying racial inclusion into "color" categories based primarily on skin tone give race in US society a physical identification and make it a category difficult to traverse. This has two implications. First, discriminating judgments can be made "on sight" and is subsequently one of the first distinctions made in social encounters. And second, ascription into a racial category tends to be a permanent one. The system of racial categorization in the US has historically abided by the "one drop" rule which established the idea that an individual belongs to a racial group of color if one possesses any fraction of "colored" blood in one's lineage. This system of categorization is changing due to increasing rates of intermarriage. Nevertheless, the centrality of race as an identity group marker is enhanced by the fact that racial group categories, like that of gender, are more easily identifiable and more permanently assigned boundaries as compared to education, occupation or other categorical distinctions that are more fluid and not immediately apparent.

The historical significance of race to the nation's development has implications for the evolution of intergroup conflict. It means that racial cleavages are relatively more entrenched and more easily triggered as compared to other lines of division. The prolonged salience and centrality of racial group boundaries have often resulted in the formation of what Ogbu (1990) has called "oppositional identities" among subordinated groups. Subordinate groups within a social hierarchy may form identities in direct opposition to the norms, values, and lifestyles of those seen as responsible for their subjugation.

In sum, the residue of colonial history, the persistence of racial inequalities, the cultural production of racial meanings and the formation of oppositional or relational identities jointly fuel the salience and centrality of race in intergroup relations and boundary formation in the US. I might note that my emphasis here on the centrality of racial group boundaries is not to imply that other boundaries are necessarily less important, but to make the connection between the subjective and structural dimension of identity formation and to provide background relevant to this particular case of racialized conflict.

Symbols and Identity Formation

Symbols can be seen as the organizing vessel around which identities are constructed (Mach 1993). Words, images, issues and actions can acquire deep symbolic meaning. Interpretive frames through which meanings are encoded and decoded contain instructive insights as to what types of information are seen as relevant, what meanings they impart, and how the information fits into a broader analytical narrative of events in life.

Symbols can conjure up past memories and be woven into contemporary narratives to state issues and actions as part of an older legacy. Salient group boundaries can be harnessed by representative icons to which individuals can relate by some analogous experience. Subsequently, symbolic discourse can facilitate "audience participation" among those who in some way identify with or take interest in an issue or event but who are not physically present.

Communication of symbols, actions, text, or other capsules of meaning takes place through a process of "encoding and decoding." This refers to the production and consumption of a message wherein its meanings are overdetermined by a range of influences, including the medium used to communicate the message, the discursive context, and different technologies used, such as that of "live news" coverage (Hall 1980). Because of the very fact that multiple publics do not see the world in the same way based on differences in vantage points and their interpretive frames, symbols and actions do not possess the same meanings for all groups. There is great room for ambiguity in meaning as publics encode and decode symbols and actions.

Groups may impute meanings to others' actions in ways in which the 'other' did not impart, especially where there may be more limited interaction and lack of overlap in frames across publics. Actions on the part of one group may not be read in the way in which that group intended their message to be conveyed, sending different images to

different players. This difference in meaning between that which is spoken and that which is heard has been referred to as "distortions" in discourse (Hall 1973, 1980). Text or acts are embedded with meanings which are socially constructed and take meaning from both their historical and immediate context (Bennett and Woollacott 1988). One outcome of this dissonance is controversy over what are acceptable norms of behavior and what constitutes justice. This dissonance often fuels the escalation of conflict.

The encoding and decoding of symbols and actions are pivotal in examining government intervention in racialized conflicts. Meanings attached to actions by government agents and the meanings read by various audiences are often not the same. Government agents, by the power vested in their position and representation as arbiters of justice, play an important part in the interactive process. Not all actions result in their intended consequences due to differences between the meanings attached to those actions by the actor and the meanings of those actions as read by the respondents. Because different groups hold different interpretive frames, groups react to others' actions in often unanticipated ways. This can result in conflict between government agencies, between those agencies and multiple publics, and between various publics in relation to a specific set of circumstances.

One of the most common forms of symbolism in cases of conflict is the personification of individuals whose experience becomes seen as representing whole groups. Individuals directly entangled in conflict can be viewed by larger audiences as typifying a group's experiences based on some set of salient boundaries of identification. What group qualities an individual represents can differ widely. In situations of polarized conflict, individuals can represent heroes, villains, perpetrators or victims. The meanings encoded and decoded in symbolic discourse can, in extreme cases, be worlds apart.

News media often influence the reading of events by their selective choice of facts, by their editorializing of news, or by giving voice to a select group of experts. They are particularly influential by the power they sway in being perceived as "objective" (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). They can inject meaning to otherwise inane actions or impart symbolic value to otherwise inconsequential events. Media reports serve as a filter in the discursive process. As such, they can shape the creation of publics and influence the scope and intensity of conflict. They can do so by 1) attracting the attention of larger audiences, thereby affecting the scope of conflict; 2)

actively participating in constructing symbolic representations of events or issues, thereby influencing the intensity of conflict; and 3) shaping popular perceptions of events through their reporting, thereby influencing the boundaries around which publics may form. Subsequently, the media often play a large role in moderating or escalating conflicts.

It may be helpful to visualize the workings of the assumptions and assertions of this theoretical approach using the analogy of the Rubik's cube puzzle⁷. Imagine that a group of people gather around a single Rubik's cube and try to solve it at the same time. Imagine further that each person is limited in their view by their particular position around the cube. From their respective positions, each group holds a unique vantage point and, therefore, may not be able to see what is on the other side of the cube at any given moment in time. If there is no communication between players or if there is opposition to considering the position of other players from those vantage points, players will come into conflict and may never find common ground. While one person twists and turns the cube thinking they are making progress, another person from a different vantage point might see those same moves as an attack or a step in the wrong direction. As a result, they may engage in a struggle over the twisting of the cube, counteracting the moves of other players and causing reactions which may be unintended and counterproductive to even their own unique goals.

We can think of issues or problems as Rubik's cubes around which groups of people gather. Events attract the attention of individuals based on some identification or interest in the problem. Identification with a problem takes place along a number of social identity group boundaries as discussed above. The salience of group boundaries defines the formation of multiple publics and maps their spatial location in relation to the cube at any given moment in time. Each public has a unique view of the problem--they each share different interpretive frames based on group experiences, historical memory, interests, norms, and values. These interpretive frames influence the understanding of the problem and others' actions.

Implicit in the definition of a problem are prescriptions to remedy them. Publics make their moves based on their view of the cube and what steps they believe they need to take to solve it from their respective vantage points. In real life, how they view the problem determines to a large extent how they respond in a given situation. Similarly, how they interpret the move of another public affects their response to them. If one group views the nature of a problem differently from another group, it is likely that that

group would read meaning into the actions of another that is not intended. Reciprocal responses can either clarify meaning and intentions or they can further distort them. One of the factors that determine whether understandings are reached is the ability of individuals to traverse many publics.

Individuals can traverse more than one public at any given time. Their life experiences may place them in numerous publics as the salience of their identities crosscut many boundaries. Or they may be privy to different social networks and have access to multiple perspectives of the cube. I will refer to these individuals as 'transpublics.' Transpublics who share frames with more than one public may find themselves in uneasy positions between differing groups. They know that there is more than one way to view the cube and more than one approach to solving the puzzle. They may have mixed feelings about the game due to the fact that they are intimately familiar with the lives of competing or conflicting players. In situations of conflict, they may be viewed with suspicion within each respective group, as they may not display the same level of conviction to one single point of view. In fact, they may introduce contrasting viewpoints which may be accepted or rejected, an outcome which may affect their standing within the group. They may have some of the broadest insights, but risk being "caught in the middle" of two contending groups of players.

While 'transpublics' may find themselves in tenuous spots, they may also be in opportune positions to effectively mediate between conflicting groups. Since they share overlapping boundaries with more than one public, they are usually able to articulate contrasting frames across group boundaries. They can translate images, meanings and concerns between publics with whose vantage points they are familiar. They can find common ground between them. Or they can forewarn one public how a twist of the cube may affect a group positioned on the other side of it and vice versa. They can reshape public opinion by speaking to a cross section of hearts and minds because they know what different groups see and feel.

The ability to mediate conflicts depends, in part, on how divergent the publics may be. Groups that find themselves on diametrically opposite sides of the cube may see an entirely different cube. This may not only mean that opposing groups define the problem differently, but they may also see an exclusively different set of resolutions to the problem. Unless the patterns on the sides of the cubes can be redrawn or, in other words, the problem reframed, the controversy may remain intractable. In some cases,

no commonalities are found and the opposing publics may work against each other for the duration of the game.

Techniques of power

According to Foucault's concept of power, power and knowledge are inseparable (Foucault 1977, 1980). Through the production of truths through discourse, individuals and groups define the nature of a problem. The defined nature of the problem often implies a causal analysis (Stone 1997). This causal analysis leads to a logical set of prescriptions to remedy the problem. The investment of power in discourse and action and the various techniques of power employed by publics further our understanding of group interaction.

Problem-solving discourse often centers on the locus of responsibility that state and civil society bear in addressing conflicts or social problems. Discourse moderates the allocation of responsibilities, rights and privileges which permits or prohibits state-sanctioned methods of social control. The establishment of truth helps to establish the acceptable limits for the use of power and the norms for behavior on the part of groups and institutions charged, by definition of the problem, with the responsibility of tackling it.

In situations of conflict or controversy, discourse over truths involves the legitimization of various techniques and uses of power by certain groups. The justification of the use of power bestows it. One technique of power is the re-creation of truth through institutions of intellectual and cultural production which, in turn, justify the investment of power and reshape the pattern of its flow. In other words, knowledge and power directly imply one another. "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (Foucault 1980, p. 93).

This view of the relationship between knowledge and power greases the gears of this conceptual framework. Publics do not possess power per se. Publics employ various techniques of power to manipulate the cube or affect any given set of circumstances. The use of physical force is but one technique of power with no effect outside of the entire domain of knowledge which mediates its effects. Aside from the use of physical force, equally influential techniques are the production of truth, shaping of popular opinion, transformation of norms and values, or the changing of expectations.

The domain of knowledge also gives the physical enforcement of social controls their meaning. Incarceration is effective as a form of punishment only to the extent to which it carries that meaning to those imprisoned. If, for example, imprisonment becomes a ritual as part of initiation rites of passage into a fraternity of prison gangs, it will be unlikely to have the exact effect intended by law enforcement agents. While the architecture of the prison was meant to discipline the body, prisoners utilize the walls of the prison and the technology within it to discipline its inhabitants as much as do prison guards and prison walls. While the incarceration of gang members is touted by law enforcement officials as a means to isolate gang members from the rest of society, prison gangs utilize the bounds of prisons to enforce discipline on fellow inmates to a higher degree than that capable on the streets. Based on the probabilities of gang members on the street eventually spending some time in the prisons, prison gangs have become a formidable force on the street. Power is not the domain of prison guards, but is a fluid force utilized in the organization of meaning through discourse as much as it is bound in the structure of the prison.

In applying this concept of power/knowledge to the analogy of the Rubik's cube, it becomes clear that the physical twisting of the cube is not the only method of playing the game. Various techniques of power may be used towards desired ends by concerned publics. First, groups can exert influence on group actions by changing the popular conception of the cube (or reframing the problem). Individuals may be successful in reframing the problem within their publics. Or a group may be successful in reframing and representing the problem among other publics. This can be accomplished through legitimizing new ways of seeing or analyzing the problem or issue. Personal testimony, argument, rumor, official studies, and the pontificating by experts or "insiders" can sway public opinion. Media reports or published propaganda can alter the filters through which the broader audience defines the problem and frames events. The manipulation of information and the production of "truths" can lead to a reinterpretation of causal events and unleash new ways of evaluating one's own as well as others' actions. The redefining or reframing of the problem can change the value and meanings attached to different pieces of evidence in light of a phenomena, thereby prescribing a different set of actions on the part of themselves as well as other participants.

In the act of reframing or redefining the problem or in the interaction between publics, individuals or groups can trigger the salience of new sets of social identity

group boundaries. A shift in salient group boundaries can shift the composition of publics and the constellation of vantage points among them (or the collection and arrangement of groups gathered around the cube). By shifting the gaze of modified publics, groups can shift the formation of alliances and lines of division. In polarized situations where opposing sides see a very different cube or problem, changes in the map of social cleavages may give leverage to one side or another. Coalitions between publics can form or fade. The ability to reframe the problem and shift the alignment of publics around the cube can alter the balance of forces through which power can be exerted.

Not all publics, of course, have equal access to the various techniques of power that may exist. Publics differ both in their ability to twist the cube or alter the gaze. Some of the realms in which individuals and publics can exert power include the ability: 1) to influence public perceptions and public opinion, 2) to influence the behavior of decision-makers, 3) to shape the norms, values and institutions of society, and 4) to harness human or institutional resources of the public or private sectors. There is a plethora of literature critiquing liberal democracy in the fields of political science and sociology which speak to the inequality of power among social groups within each of these realms. Economic class, race and gender are some of the major variables along which power has historically been differentiated. The “black box” mediating democratic processes within state institutions, the role of money in politics and the power of the media in cultural production are but a few of the problems addressed in critiques of the liberal state. These critiques are useful in identifying the wide range of methods by which power is exerted as well as understanding the varied sources of influence from which power can be brought to bear.

Points of intervention and impacts of policy and state intervention

As discussed previously, multiple publics, by definition, do not share the exact same sets of experiences, values and epistemologies. Subsequently, the interpretation of and reaction to the same event is rarely uniform. This has grave implications for government policies and actions. It is often the case that government intervention in cases of conflict may have very different meanings for different groups, resulting in mixed outcomes of both intended and unintended consequences.

Government institutions, by the power of their legitimate standing as well as by their technological and organizational resources, are particularly influential in the

ongoing shaping of social cleavages and race relations.⁸ In the following section, I discuss three ways in which institutions can shape racial formation and race relations by: 1) imposing or consenting to structural constraints which discriminate along ethnic or racial boundaries, 2) participating as an independent actor in the cultural construction of racial and ethnic meanings, and 3) taking actions which increase or decrease the salience of racial group boundaries in specific group encounters.

Imposing or consenting to structural constraints which discriminate along ethnic or racial boundaries - In an earlier section, a distinction was made between the *cognitive* dimension of situational identity and the *structural* dimension. A similar distinction can also be made between the impact of the *setting* and the impact of the *situation* of identity formation. Both the setting and the situation affect the significance of various identity group boundaries, but they do so at different levels of perception and boundary formation. The setting refers to the overall structure of ethnic group relations, including the relative political, social, and economic status of groups and the distribution of material and social capital and resources among them (Okamura 1981). The situation, on the other hand, refers to the circumstances immediately surrounding events at a particular moment in time.

Government actions and government policies have a great deal to do with the setting--the structure of race and social relations in the US. In particular, state powers can be used to moderate the distribution and redistribution of wealth and capital. Institutions can affect patterns of residential settlement, educational attainment, and other factors affecting racial group interaction and mobility through tax, education, housing, employment, transportation, banking, and a myriad of other policies. Recent scholarship has documented the ongoing effects of institutions on social stratification and lasting inequalities among racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. (Goldsmith and Blakely 1992, Melendez 1993, Oliver 1995, Ong 1994).

State actions historically have played dual roles--that of creating greater as well as lesser socio-economic and political stratification. Laws that were both explicitly racial such as slavery laws and those which were not explicitly racial but were legislated to impose social control over a particular population, such as literacy requirements which limited voting rights for minority and immigrant populations, have increased the centrality of racial and ethnic group boundaries in American life. The converse is also true. In periods in which government policies relieved formal racial barriers, other group identity boundaries came into fuller view, though race may have never lost its centrality.

Omi and Winant (1994) argue that the state is racially structured--that inherent in state institutions, policies, supporting conditions, rules and social relations are implicit and explicit racial meanings as well as impacts. Though not all public or private institutions are in the sole service of a dominant group, they have throughout US history maintained the hegemony of a system which privileges a relatively small, predominantly white and economically powerful class of wealthy elite. Political contests are sites for both the ongoing formation of racial meanings and struggle over the racial order. Government policies and state actions are racial in that they have differential impacts on racial groups, contain ideas about the meaning of race, and serve to (in more cases than not) support the racial order in terms of socioeconomic status as well as normative culture.

The perception of government policies and practices are as significant as the actions themselves. Actions of government agents and institutions may not always be read by publics in the way they are intended. Settings and situations are open to interpretation. It is not only the action of government institutions, but how those actions are communicated, read and interpreted which affect the situational salience of identity group boundaries. This will be discussed further in relationship to government impacts on the situational dimension of identity formation.

Government institutions as actor in the cultural production of racial and ethnic meanings - Intergroup relations are shaped in large part by the meanings that are embraced and ascribed to membership in group categories. The production of racial meanings takes place at the level of personal relationships, "objective" relationships such as work, and in cultural representation (Omi and Winant 1994). The formation of racial meanings through political struggle has been the focus of numerous studies (see Carmines and Stimson 1989, Dominguez 1986, Edsall and Edsall 1991, Omi and Winant 1994). The process of racial formation involves a dual process of disorganization of dominant ideology and the construction of oppositional frameworks (Omi and Winant 1994).

While the state is a site of racial formation, government agents and institutions can also operate as autonomous actors in the political contest and production of racial meanings. For example, Hall, et al. (1978) illustrate the role of state institutions in the process of racial formation in British society. He describes the role of police and the judiciary in creating "moral panics." Government institutions, with the cooperation of the media, played an active role in defining situations, selecting targets, initiating

campaigns, selectively signifying their actions to the public at large and in legitimating their actions through accounts of situations. Mugging was assigned as a Black crime, located in and arising from the conditions of life in Black urban "ghettos". The tenor of the discourse associated Blackness as a category with the characteristic of criminal proclivity. A well-publicized incident came to symbolize the deterioration of societal values and the social order in the metaphoric representation of the "ghetto." The social construction of racial meanings and their association with the meaning of place have a great bearing on the way in which groups view themselves and each other and on the extent and types of interactions which individuals pursue.

Government actions which increase or decrease the salience of racial group boundaries in specific group encounters - The actions on the part of specific government agents and agencies not only affect race relations by shaping the setting of identity formation, but they also can alter boundary formation in specific situations. Government intervention can deepen cleavages along racial group boundaries as much as they can decrease their relative salience. To the extent that government agencies can affect the shifting lines of cleavage, they may exacerbate or ameliorate the racialization of conflicts.

The role of state intervention in intergroup conflict has been discussed by scholars of international ethnic relations. Horowitz (1986) observed that when government institutions are perceived to favor one group over another, the disfavored group often redoubles its efforts to gain recognition and redemption, resulting in intensified conflict. The desire for group worth and legitimacy can explain why conflicts can be intensified by actions on the part of the state, as grand arbiter of precious psychological goods (see also Esman 1990 and Ryan 1990). Such tensions can also be further exacerbated through political mobilization where political entrepreneurs can rally ethnic groups under the banner of neglect and injustice. Similar findings have been made in psychological studies of intergroup behavior where favoritism exhibited on the part of an authority figure brewed antagonisms between two competing groups (Brewer and Kramer 1985). Whether intentional or not, government actions perceived as favoring one group over another can result in the exacerbation of conflict.

But it also important to consider the respective viewpoints of the conflicting parties as to their responses to government actions. Some groups, for instance, may not care about government-initiated validation of their group worth, particularly

marginalized groups who have already formed oppositional identities to mainstream norms and values. Rather than analyzing the conflict based on an assumption of psychological motive attributed to all groups, we should more closely examine how government actions are perceived by each respective group and how others' actions, including those of government institutions, are interpreted within the context of larger frames or narratives through which each group makes sense of the world. It is important to understand the meanings that others' actions take on within group-specific metanarratives in order to understand group interactions. This includes responses to government intervention in racialized conflicts since a single act may take on different meanings for different groups.

Some actions may increase the salience of racial group boundaries, while other actions may increase the salience of class, neighborhood, or gender distinctions. For example, if the disfavored group suspects racially-based collaboration between government agencies and their adversary, this can deepen racial cleavages and instill greater fear and distrust along racial lines. This situation can become particularly sensitive in cases where the adversarial groups share other salient group boundaries such as class membership. In these instances, feelings of betrayal and other emotions can create even further strain on group tensions. One of the colloquial terms referring to bias and its effects on intergroup relations is the "strategy of divide and conquer." Whether or not the goal is conquest, actions perceived as being biased can certainly have divisive effects.

On the other hand, actions on the part of government agencies may ameliorate the racialization of conflicts in specific situations by shifting salient group boundaries to that other than race. For example, threats of government closures of public hospitals can lessen the salience of racial group contention over affirmative action policies and lay groundwork for cooperation across racial group boundaries among all government employees threatened by layoffs.

Individuals and groups exert techniques of power just as state institutions do. There are, however, three reasons for the emphasis on the role of government in this section. One, as mentioned earlier, is the fact that government institutions are ordained powers that other groups do not possess by virtue of official sanctions, legitimate standing, and vast resources. Second, actions on the part of government in US society have an impact on individuals in a unique way as compared to less democratized nations based on the expectations placed upon government institutions. One of the specific

qualities of US society is an expectation that government institutions are to serve as neutral arbiters and upholders of constitutional and civil rights. Not everyone believes that this is their role in actuality. Some believe that inequality and injustice pervade society as a result of social control functions of government. Nevertheless, one of the stronger unifying forces in US society is at least a hope that formal state institutions offer remedies for injustice and opportunities for redress. The hope for fair resolution of conflicts has promoted dialogue when other lines of communication have failed. When the state is seen as biased, this can cause resentment among groups who believe they have been treated unfairly. Conflicts can reach a heightened level of intensity and intractability when groups see no other recourse through formal processes and/or believe government institutions are biased against them. And third, an examination of the role of government may help us find opportunities to improve the state of race relations. The increase in racialized conflicts in the US and ethnic conflict abroad poses new challenges for the future.

In sum, government institutions affect social cleavages and the trajectory of conflict by imposing or consenting to overall structural constraints which increase the centrality of racial group boundaries, by participating as an independent actor in the cultural construction of racial and ethnic meanings, and by taking actions which increase or decrease the salience of racial group boundaries in specific situations. Actions taken without regard for differences among multiple publics can result in an unlimited range of consequences, including greater social polarization.

Several scholars have touched upon the problem of unintended consequences in relation to law enforcement intervention in gang-related crime. Klein (1993), for example, discussed the danger of "boomerang" effects of gang suppression policy. He warns that the message that suppression approaches intend to send to deter gang members from crime may, in fact, encourage criminal behavior given the "oppositional culture" among gangs themselves. When police falsely arrest an individual suspected of illegal activity, their interrogation may have the effect of increasing identification, despite any prior affiliation, with those who do break the law and receive the same treatment. The more frequently police mistakenly identify residents within a community of criminal activity, the wider the cleavage becomes between police and residents relative to those between residents and those committing crime. A player can twist the cube in such a way as to convey a message to an entire group, thus, unifying publics whose alliances may have been much more tenuous prior to the move or action.

The reference to the Rubik's cube is presented as a conceptual device to aid in our understanding of intergroup dynamics among multiple publics. There are four features which lend to its applicability to intergroup conflict, particularly those which become racialized. First, it acknowledges multiple vantage points from which groups view the world based on differences in group experiences, norms, values, belief systems, interests, agendas and interpretive frames. Second, it recognizes the symbolic aspect of group interaction and the social process by which publics can come to some consensus in the formulation of meanings as well by which publics can misread other publics. Third, it accommodates differentials in power, including different techniques of power and different levels of standing and consent in the use of power. And fourth, it simultaneously captures three dynamics in group interaction: 1) shifts in salient group boundaries in their relation to changing circumstances, 2) the importance of interpretation in group interaction, and 3) shifts in group alliances and "us vs. them" divisions.

In sum, I have made the following propositions in this chapter: a) Multiple publics form in relation to social events and issues based on the situational salience of identity group boundaries; b) these publics represent potential cleavages around which conflicts or controversies can escalate; c) due to historical reasons, racial boundaries maintain a high degree of centrality in the organization of social relations and, therefore, can become one of the more salient in social interaction; and d) in situations of conflict or controversy, multiple publics including government institutions can influence the degree of salience of racial group boundaries as well as the formation of racial meanings and thereby can contribute to the healing or widening of racial division. The next five chapters will focus on the case study and law enforcement policies and practices related to it. The first two of the five will give an historic background to the study site. The remaining three chapters will cover the escalation of the gang war and two different approaches by law enforcement agents to the conflict.

¹ This is not to imply that all conflicts can or should be mediated or resolved, but there are many that have little or no value to any party if left to continue.

² The idea that there is more than one "public" is not a new one. John Dewey, for example, defined the public as any constituency of people brought about by an impingement of their rights due to others' actions (Dewey 1927). In one example of the creation of a "public," he describes a group of neighbors living alongside a stream. When one family dumps waste into the stream, it spoils the purity of the water for all those living downstream who, in response to the dumping, constitute a public. By his definition, publics are formed out of a common interest and this common interest is the "public good."

³ Waters (1992) emphasizes the mode of incorporation into US society (voluntary immigrants or non-voluntary groups) as a major factor shaping a group's interpretive lens.

⁴For a review of social anthropological literature on "situational ethnicity," see Okamura (1981).

⁵In other literature, these aspects of situational identity have also been described as ascribed or achieved aspects of identity, or as voluntary or involuntary formations of race and ethnicity.

⁶In the anthropological and much of the sociological literature, race is considered a subset of ethnicity based on phenotypical characteristics, primarily skin color. For the purposes of this study, I will define ethnicity and race as two distinct categories on an equal level of analysis with the former emphasizing culturally defined boundaries and the latter referring to phenotypically defined boundaries.

⁷A Rubik's cube is a six-sided cube. The cube is divided further into smaller sections, each side having been partitioned into three rows and three columns. In other words, the one single cube is partitioned into 27 smaller cubes (3 rows x 3 columns x 3 deep = 27 cubes). Each side of the single cube displays nine squares. All nine squares on any side of the cube are all of the same color. Each *side* of the cube (including its nine smaller squares) is painted a different color. The color scheme on each side of the cube can be changed with a simple twist at any of the cube's six partitions which dice the cube into its 27 sections. At the start of the puzzle, the cube has been twisted and turned so that the nine squares on each side are filled with an array of different colors. The puzzle is solved when all of the nine squares on each side of the cube are returned to its original position with each side showing only one color. In order to solve the puzzle, it is necessary to have a view of all sides of the cube prior to each move and to be able to know how a turn of the cube would affect all four sides simultaneously. A quarter-turn might solve one side of the puzzle, but may bring a setback to another side. One must be able to anticipate the effects of each turn on the various sides of the cube in order to make progress. A move may cause a setback to some of the sides, but that would cause no alarm if the moves are planned in a sequence which eventually leads to the solving all sides of the cube.

⁸By government institutions, I include the individual agents, organizational entities, and the structure, rules and norms which govern their behavior. This is a broad definition of the term institution as has been defined by the literature on "new institutionalism" in political science. See March and Olsen (1984) for a discussion on 'new institutionalism' the roles of institutions in political life.

CHAPTER 4

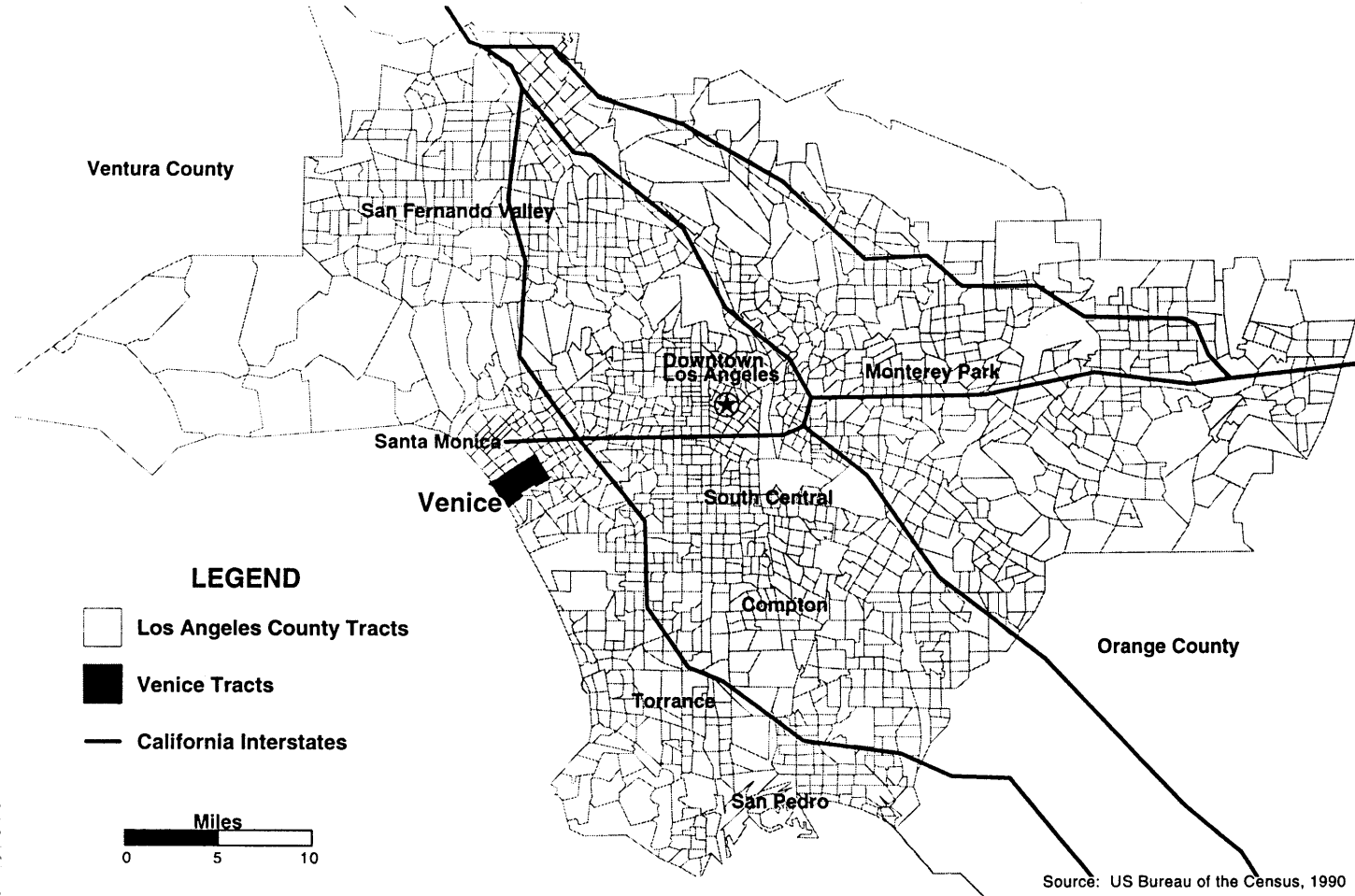
VENICE: A GEOGRAPHY OF MULTIPLE PUBLICS

Venice is one of the oldest and most diverse neighborhoods in the city of Los Angeles, and its history is one of the most colorful and well-documented in the region. As Venice underwent each of its many transformations, another layer of history was added to the map of social relations. From early rancho days through its heyday as “Venice of America” to changes brought with World War II through the nineties, people from a wide array of backgrounds and cultures have come to call Venice home. While the historical development of the neighborhood has made it one of the most culturally diverse, that same history has created social, structural, and institutional relations within which race, class, and ethnic group boundaries have remained relevant and salient. This is the setting out of which the tensions between the various gangs emerged in 1993. This historical overview highlights the features on the map of multiple publics.

When violence broke out between several gangs, it grabbed the attention of a variety of individuals and government agencies. Multiple publics formed around salient group boundaries and focused on different concerns. Gang members were concerned for their personal safety as well as the reputation, survival, and economic livelihood of their organization. Residents who lived in the neighborhood were concerned for their safety; Black and Latino residents in particular felt especially endangered by the racialized pattern of the violence, since all those killed and nearly all those injured were either African American or Latino. Those who were homeowners were concerned as well about their property values and rents; those who were renters saw the violence bring down their rents. Some residents had friends or relatives in the gangs and were concerned for their safety and livelihood. Law enforcement personnel were focused on the arrest and incarceration of youth they may have long identified as gang members and were also very concerned about their own safety. All eventually wanted a halt to the violence, some for the shared commitment to peace and others for somewhat different reasons.

Among the many individuals affected or involved in this crisis, there were great variations in the way in which they defined the problem. They thus had different solutions which they felt would best resolve the conflict, end the violence and improve the conditions in the neighborhood. They had different styles and strategies for getting things done. They had different goals and interests in responding to the problem. And

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problem. These publics grouped according to these differences in interests, perspectives, viewpoints, strategies, goals and styles. They represented different players standing around the Rubik's cube, trying to solve the puzzle as they saw it from their particular vantage point, using the powers they had at their disposal, and doing it in their own unique ways. In their efforts to solve the problem, some groups communicated and cooperated with each other while others did not. Some groups came into direct conflict with one another, while other divergent efforts simply ran parallel to other.

Salient group boundaries and multiple publics

As will be seen in this case study, boundaries were neither static nor singular. Individuals held multiple identities, each boundary of which ebbed and flowed in relative salience to another. Class, race, gender, political affiliation, kinship, ethnic ancestry, religion, along with many other possible identity markers increased or decreased in relevance between moments in time. The salience and centrality of identity group boundaries shaped the emergence of groups and the interpretive frames through which individuals made meaning of events and actions to their lives.

It is useful to think of multiple publics in terms of shared identity group boundaries for several reasons. First, it allows for the identification of shifts in the formation of publics. Rarely do groups consist of the same set of individuals over time. Groups more commonly change, even if only marginally, in composition and character as the nature of their concerns are redefined. A group may gather, formally or informally, in response to a problem, but as the popular definition of the problem shifts, so does the composition of individuals who come to form around it. Second, the identification of publics in terms of salient identity group boundaries allows us to study the behavior of individuals as members of multiple groups. Traditionally, individuals are identified with conservatives or liberals, with developers or renters, or with capital or labor. While these categories may comprise some of the more salient group boundaries in our society, they do not necessarily capture the complexity of human preferences, the changing meanings of these categories and the ambivalence that people may feel navigating several allegiances. Individuals do not always align with the same groups across a spectrum of issues. Nor do individuals find affinity with a group in all situations. Similarly, a position that a group may take may not represent the viewpoint of all its members.

Thus, defining publics in this way gives us a more powerful and precise lens in understanding subtle differences within groups and shifts within group formation. By looking at publics as situational groups defined along a set of salient group boundaries, we may be more conscious of where their interpretive frames overlap and where they may diverge. If we pay too little attention to internal differences within groups, we may overlook shifts in group composition, changes in group formation, or more nuanced explanations for group behavior. For example, a group of neighbors who uniformly oppose police abuse against youth may differ with one another in their views on criminal justice policies. As activities move from advocating for police accountability to working with local patrol units to police their neighborhood, the emergence of publics may very well shift. Race may be the more salient group boundary in one situation, while property ownership may be the more salient boundary in the latter, leading to the involvement of homeowners across a spectrum of racial backgrounds. No one boundary is necessarily exclusive of another, and differences along racial boundaries may arise in the newly reconstituted group. This approach to the study of shifting group boundaries recalls E.E. Schattschneider's (1960) approach towards shifting political boundaries according to the particular issue at stake. Individuals or groups realign on different sets of axes, depending on the nature of the issue and how it is defined. In the case of multiple publics, they emerge and reemerge along various combinations of identity group boundaries in reference to a defined situation or problem.

In order to understand the controversy over police response to the racialized gang war, we need to understand the salient group boundaries along which multiple publics could have potentially formed in response to its outbreak. There was no predetermined set of boundaries along which the conflict was to escalate. Depending upon the relative salience of any number of identity group boundaries in a given situation, external influences exerted on it, and the social constructions of "us" and "them," conflicts could have escalated along several different faultlines or boundaries. In the case described in this study, one of the cleavages along which the gang war escalated was racial division. At the same time, however, there were cross-cutting ties which tempered the spread of social antagonisms. Though instances of conflict often overshadowed instances of cooperation between racially polarized groups, it is instructive to understand the dual forces of conflict and solidarity and the coexistent social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

Identities and group boundaries are formed in the history of the social setting. They are steeped in a rich history of politics, economic changes, demographic shifts, and contests over the land and the meaning of place. Controversy can be understood in the multiple visions of Venice which date back over one hundred years. This history lives in the memories of the elders and through the stories passed along the generations. Different segments of the population are privy to different fragments and versions of history. The following historical overview does not encompass their histories, but is a synthesis of the historical record which may help us understand their stories and explanations about the gang war and police responses to it. For now, I present an historical overview as it helps us to survey social identities and understand the emergence of multiple publics during the time of the gang war in 1993.

Venice of many visions

As one drives through the Oakwood section of Venice where much of the gang war was centered, one sees a neighborhood of contrasts. One hundred year old bungalows sit nestled behind trimmed lawns alongside techno-industrial style condos in the rapidly changing seaside community. The real estate boom of the 1980s spurred market-driven gentrification that has encroached upon the last remaining tracts of low-income housing along the southern California coastline. The economic recession at the end of that decade, however, halted the gentrification process mid-stream. Long-term residents hang on to their way of life, while relative newcomers and speculators wait patiently for the next boom cycle to complete the transformation process.

Venice has become a microcosm of the city. Unlike other neighborhoods situated along the path of metropolitan sprawl, Venice has become home to a wide spectrum of the population mirroring much of the racial and cultural diversity that exists throughout the city. Populations which, in other neighborhoods, have moved progressively outwards from the central city with suburban migration have all collected in this westernmost edge of Los Angeles. Suburbanization that would have otherwise passed through Venice, abruptly ended at its Pacific shore. Since it is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the region, the suburban sprawl that filled the landscape from downtown to the beach simply brought a steady increase in population. Instead of continued westward growth, population settlement became increasingly dense and more diverse.

Ironically, the unique history of Venice gives it a universal quality. Its place in history, makes a study of so-called "Little Italy" a peek into the social dynamics of greater Los Angeles itself. Families tracing their ancestral roots back to preindustrial mesoamerica reside next to newly arrived transplants. Rich, poor, old, young, immigrant, native-born, Black, Latino, White, Asian, and Native American share the same space. Cleavages and bonds run along and across numerous boundaries of race, gender, income, wealth, generation, language, religion, civic association, ideology, family relations and age. With recent changes in demographic composition along with changes in real estate markets, many groups define themselves in relation to space and struggle to define its use.

Rancho la Ballona

Venice has enjoyed notoriety for many reasons stretching across the decades. Until the late 1800s, the land upon which Venice was built was part of a Mexican rancho owned by the Machado and Talamantes families (Adler 1969). They had stocked the area with long-horned cattle during California's pastoral era near the beginning of the nineteenth century. They eventually petitioned the Mexican governor for a formal grant to the land they called "Rancho la Ballona," named after their ancestral township in Spain (Robinson 1939). Before then, the land had been home to Mission Indians who lived off the fertile lands and estuaries along Santa Monica Bay. The region along with the entire southwest territory--comprised of what would become the five states of California, Nevada, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona--was annexed from Mexico by the US after the Mexican American War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. A United States Land Commission was established to review and adjust the boundaries of what were previously Mexican land grants. In 1854, the commission upheld the La Ballona Rancho grant, and the estates continued to remain in the name of the relatives and friends of the two families (Adler 1969).

The Talamantes and Machado families did not maintain ownership of the land for very long after the US conquest and by the end of the century, speculators and land developers gained legal ownership over the parcels closer to the beach. The ending of the Civil War and the construction of the trans-continental railroad brought settlers, developers, and land speculators who transformed the entire west. One such speculator by the name of Moses L. Wicks gained control of oceanside portions of the La Ballona Rancho land. He attracted real estate speculators and sold tracts to prospective developers. Before he completed the sales of his parcels and realized the full potential of

land development, the 1880s economic bust ended the short wave of speculation (Adler 1969). This halt, however, was only temporary.

“Venice of America”

In 1892, capitalist Abbot Kinney induced the Santa Fe Railroad to extend the rail line to his land tract and almost single-handedly engineered "Venice of America," a quintessential seaside resort, recreation, and cultural center. Kinney was a cigarette manufacturing tycoon who struck a fortune with his family's Sweet Caporal cigarettes. He was well-traveled and well-educated with an eccentric flare for business and entertainment. He developed a tourist spot borrowing Venetian architecture and landscaping highlighted by canals dredged inland and piers built out over the Santa Monica Bay. Competition between pier developers triggered the most imaginative array of roller coasters, games, pools, and funhouses of that time. A series of natural disasters and mysterious fires eventually brought an end to the flurry of recreational innovation, but not before tourism had brought more land speculators and developers. By the 1920s, Venice's population was predominately White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant with the lowest illiteracy rate in the state of California (Cunningham 1976).

The first African Americans to arrive in the Venice area came from the South in search of work in the early 1900s.¹ Abbot Kinney employed African American men and women as manual laborers, service workers and servants in his entrepreneurial exploits. Many of the affluent Anglo families hired African Americans as servants in their canalside homes. Racially exclusive housing covenants prohibited the settlement of the African American population in many sections of town. One of the few places they were allowed to settle was a one-square mile area of Venice which later became known as Oakwood. During this period, this neighborhood located north of the canals was referred to by some as the “servants quarters” of Venice.

Cunningham (1976) argues that Kinney's dominance stunted the development of more democratic institutions in the community and sent Venice on a political trajectory which ended in fragmentation and neighborhood rivalry. Kinney became known as the "founder" of Venice and served as its patriarch. Since Kinney oversaw so much of the affairs of the incorporated city of Venice, his death in 1920 brought political chaos and financial instability. Five years later, citizens voted to consolidate with the city of Los Angeles. The Great Depression of 1929 and a serious earthquake in 1933 caused further economic devastation to the area. While many had hoped that consolidation into the city of Los Angeles would provide better support, many social and infrastructure

needs of Venice were overlooked within the larger city bureaucracy (Cunningham 1976).

World War II and post-war growth

The period of largest numerical growth took place directly following World War II, firmly establishing Venice as a relatively stable middle class and blue collar community. The war economy and the post-war boom that lasted through the fifties brought an influx of working-class families of all creeds and colors, increasing the population from 1940 to 1960 by 65 percent (from 23,263 persons to 38,365 persons). In the 1930s, Douglas Aircraft Company set up a factory in neighboring Santa Monica and soon aircraft parts manufacturing plants were set up in nearby vicinities, including Venice. Soon, North American and Hughes would open aircraft industry plants in nearby Inglewood, Culver City and the Del Rey Bluffs, employing thousands who settled along the coast (Adler 1976). Multiplier effects were felt all along the coast, making the Los Angeles leg of California Coast Highway 1, which ran through Venice, a major commercial corridor. Though not all groups enjoyed the benefits of economic growth, many were able to take advantage of opportunities which it offered. The infusion of federal aid which accompanied large military contracts coupled with lower interest rates and reasonable land values led to the creation of stable working class neighborhoods with high rates of home ownership in the area.

The reach of prosperity had the potential to lessen prior racial and class divisions had it not been for the fact that the bounties of economic growth were not equally realized and the institutions of legal segregation were still in place. While affordable housing was constructed on the eastern portions of Venice, the southern beachfront stretch, originally tarred by unsightly oil derricks propped up alongside residential bungalows, eventually became the most exclusive parcel of Venice thanks to city-sponsored urban renewal (Cunningham 1976). Segregated military combat units, a racially skewed occupational division of labor, and racially exclusive housing covenants continued to shape race relations and the racial settlement pattern during this era of growth and change. While the population became more heterogeneous, their spatial distribution remained homogeneous.

African Americans were most adversely affected by racially discriminatory housing practices. Residential segregation was strictly practiced and did not begin to abate until years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1965. Highway 1 had become a major barrier separating Oakwood from the adjacent Walgrove section.

Housing developments on the east side of the highway were built to accommodate the influx of white manufacturing workers during the post-war boom. As of 1960, 3,191 African Americans were recorded in the official census as living in Oakwood. In contrast, only two African Americans lived in the Walgrove section across Highway 1 in an area of similar geographic and population size². In the similarly sized section immediately south of Venice Boulevard, only eleven African Americans were counted and only 64 were counted to the west of Oakwood. The one-square mile neighborhood of Oakwood, though still majority non-Black, became the social and cultural center for African Americans on the western end of the city.

Among African American residents, Oakwood's legacy as the only place in Venice they were allowed to live in pre-Civil Rights America continues to hold powerful meaning. Stories of some of the most well known of these families have been shared in public venues, including forums, publications, and popular media. One of the early African American families known to settle in Venice was the Tabor family. Irvin Tabor worked as a chauffeur and personal assistant to Abbot Kinney. When Abbot Kinney passed away in 1920, he left his home to Mr. Tabor. Because of racially prohibitive housing policies, the house was lifted off its foundation and moved to the Oakwood section of Venice on Sixth Avenue. It has been restored and preserved as an historic building in the registry of historic sites in the state of California.

Residents formed other cultural enclaves as well. To the west and south of the Oakwood neighborhood, a large Jewish population had settled, many of whom were Russian and Polish immigrants who relocated to Venice during the Depression years (Cunningham 1976). Institutions that served their religious, social and cultural needs thrived. Throughout the westside, the Jewish population would continue to grow and shape the politics of the city in decades following. To the west and along the beachfront, an active artisan and beatnik community had formed during the fifties and sixties, though many were later driven out by a series of government abatements. Many Japanese American families had settled in Venice as farmers prior to World War II, but were incarcerated as part of the mass removal of Americans of Japanese ancestry from the West coast in 1942. Some did return to Venice at war's end. The Latino population continued to grow with the help of steady immigration from Mexico. They, too, established churches and cultural institutions which thrived over the years.

During the fifties and sixties, Venice was shifted back and forth between two city council districts and was split between two state assembly districts as well as

between two US congressional districts such that there was no clear or single representative at any of the three levels of government (Adler 1976). Cunningham (1976) states that "in the absence of any compelling forces to give them shape or substance, the 40,000 people living in Venice during the 1960s, while seeming to fall apart have, in actuality, fallen back into smaller, more manageable units of identification: neighborhoods became ascendant by default" (Adler 1976, p. 211). Coupled with a lack of community cohesion, increasing heterogeneity and an absence of unifying local leadership, Venice charted a course of political and social division. Neighborhoods within Venice remained fairly fragmented to the 1990s.

The Civil Rights movement and racial solidarity

The Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s signified an era of increasing racial cooperation, at least in the Venice area of Los Angeles. Venice was relatively liberal in its political attitudes. The Oakwood neighborhood of Venice was one of the most influential neighborhoods in Venice politics during the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Jews, and Whites of other European descent joined in significant campaigns to empower a local political base from which social reforms were advocated. Residents waged intensive voter registration campaigns, sat on local funding boards, established a myriad of social service agencies, conducted voluntary self-help projects, lobbied local, state, and federal legislators, built networks throughout city and county government, and promoted racial cooperation and civic participation.

Various community-based programs were formed in Oakwood. Barrios Unidos, Community Service Organization, Venice Action Committee, Project Action, Venice Teen Post, Venice Drug Coalition, and a variety of social service agencies were established. Many of these organizations remained in operation to the time of this study. Neighborhood organizations such as the Latino-based Community Service Organization and the African American-based Pearl White Theater worked hand-in-hand with residents of all racial backgrounds in their pursuit of civil rights. Governing bodies such as the Greater Los Angeles Community Action Agency (GLACAA) included local residents and guaranteed a minimum level of grassroots involvement, including the participation of those most disenfranchised and economically marginalized. The Democratic Party also built a strong base on the westside which included Oakwood residents.

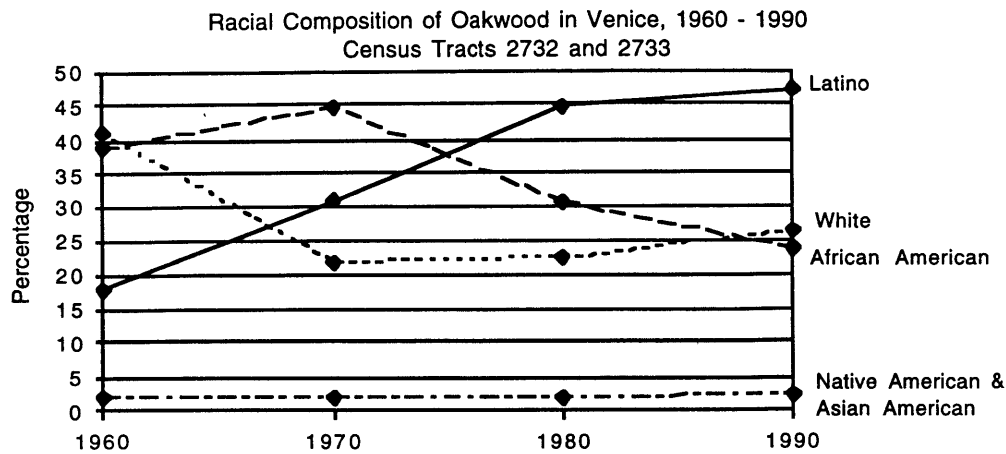
Within the civil rights movement there were deep-felt differences in political ideology regarding issues of racial integration, self-determination, cooperation with government institutions, use of violence, forms of democratic participation, and control over government resources. There was also some animosity between Latin American immigrants and some African Americans surrounding a spree of robbery-related attacks on immigrant men who did not utilize banking services and tended to carry large sums of cash. Nevertheless, the dominant political atmosphere set under the spirit and slogan of civil rights was inclusionary and forward-looking. As civil rights veteran Pearl White repeatedly states, “we’re for *all* poor people in Venice, Black, Brown, Yellow, Red or White.” The quality of interaction between neighbors was characterized by a great degree of optimism, openness and willingness to share. House meetings, community forums, potlucks, sports activities, classrooms and after school activities reflected more hopeful times. While race was certainly a salient group boundary, the movement for civil rights and equality also enhanced a more encompassing social identity of those who supported its principles and participated in its work.

Immigration, gentrification and polarization

Since the Immigration Act of 1965, many immigrants from Asia, Mexico and other parts of Central and South America have entered the US market in search of jobs and opportunities. Most worked in the low-wage sectors, as manual laborers and service industry workers. The Civil Rights Act was also passed in 1965, ending *de jure* segregation. Two subsequent trends affected the demographic composition of Venice. The lifting of racial covenants resulted in greater dispersal of African Americans outside of the Oakwood boundaries and into the surrounding neighborhoods. At the same time, Oakwood experienced a steady increase in immigrants from Latin America and Asia, particularly among the younger generation. This led to a rapid demographic shift in the Oakwood neighborhood.

In 1970, African Americans comprised 45 percent of Oakwood’s population while Latinos comprised 31 percent. By 1990, the proportions were more than reversed--the Latino population increased to 48 percent while African Americans declined to 24 percent. Meanwhile, the White population sharply declined from 1960 to 1970 but began to increase during the 1980s (US Bureau of the Census, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990).

Figure 4.1



Source: US Bureau of the Census, Census of Population and Housing, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990

From the 1980s, a political shift took place as liberal views towards state and civil society relations gave in to conservative views, some of which meshed more closely with expectations held by many new immigrants. The “personal responsibility” campaign slogan sent a loud message that one can overcome poverty and become financially and otherwise successful if one only worked hard. Immigrants filled many low-paying jobs which fell below the reservation wage of many US-born workers. Moral appeals for personal responsibility placed blame and shame on those who had become marginalized from mainstream economic and political life.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles region was experiencing the dislocating impacts of global economic restructuring (Soja 1987, Sassen 1994). Manufacturing firms, particularly in the automobile and aerospace industries, suffered huge layoffs with the closing or relocating of large plants. Simultaneously, the region saw an increase in the retail and service sectors as Los Angeles gained increasing prominence as a global financial center of the Pacific rim. Many high-paying skilled jobs were replaced by low-paying unskilled jobs with fewer benefits and less job security. This trend was certainly felt on the westside with the closing of several major aerospace plants and growth in the retail trades. Drastic cuts in social programs, dominance of conservative rhetoric in public discourse combined with continued discrimination in the job market left many African Americans in particular with an even greater sense of social abandonment.

The racialization of local politics added fuel to the sense of angst over economic retrenchment and rightward political trends. Racial politics was not new. Tom Bradley,

who was the first Black mayor of Los Angeles in recent history (1969-1993), ran on a platform of racial inclusion (Sonenshein 1993). But rather than calling for multiracial solidarity under the banner of racial inclusion, more recent election campaigns have made appeals to ethnic- and racially-based sentiments under banners bordering on exclusivity. Whether it be that Asians and Latinos get a fair share of political representation proportional to their increasing numbers, or that African Americans have a right to a fair share of economic opportunities, or Whites get their share under “reverse discrimination”, claims to a “fair share” have been fought with controversy. Important racial and ethnic movements have walked a fine line between an inclusive ideology fueled by ethnic and racial pride and one fostering ethnic and racial privilege.

During the eighties, conflicts between groups in Oakwood climaxed over housing and gentrification, as the real estate market began to push up the value of property. Developers and homeowners purchased older buildings and replaced them with higher density apartments and condominiums as well as upscale single family homes. Housing in tracts immediately surrounding Oakwood commanded increasingly higher prices and attracted a largely upper-income, professional, and predominately White residential population. As the rents and home prices rose, the proportion of affordable housing stock began to shrink (see Table 4.1). Sixties beatniks and counterculture centers were all but driven out of Venice by skyrocketing rents and city-sponsored abatement operations to “clean up” the neighborhood. Elderly residents on fixed incomes and families with low incomes struggled to hang on to the dwindling stock of low-rent housing. Competition for affordable housing became a source of racial tensions, as some residents felt that landlords often discriminated against African Americans in favor of Latino tenants (Forster 1979).

The major divides lay between richer and poorer and between racial and ethnic groups, though certainly other salient group boundaries add to the complex map of divisions and associations. These social cleavages were manifest in many ways, but most obviously in the architectural forms of the newer buildings. Newer structures fit the description of Mike Davis’ “City of Quartz,” with multi-level housing shielded behind high fences, elaborate security devices, electronic gates, iron bars and thorny bougainvillea scaling surrounding walls. Though security measures may not have been

Table 4.1

Median House Value, Oakwood, 1969-1989
(in 1990 dollars)³

1969	\$ 90,000
1979	\$150,000
1989	\$280,000

Source: US Bureau of the Census, Census of Population and Housing, 1970, 1980, 1990.

taken to send a message of social distance to old-time neighbors, nor did all newcomers embrace this architectural form, many long-standing residents took objection to what they saw as encroachment by those with greater wealth. As one resident described, “they build high walls and hide behind them.”

Gentrification also increased the salience of racial boundaries as new housing was built and occupied by mostly white owners and tenants. Referred to by some as “the gentrified people,” higher income white property owners were seen by longtime residents as “taking over” the neighborhood. Among African Americans, real estate developments represented another example in the litany of efforts to destroy their historic community. Many of the areas surrounding Oakwood had already been refaced by urban renewal and gentrification. References are often made to two such dislocations of low income, Latino and African American residents who moved to Venice with urban renewal in Santa Monica and the construction of Interstate Highway 10 to the north as well as the Los Angeles International airport to the south.⁴ Past efforts to “protect” the community are also retold. Among these efforts was the construction of low-income housing complexes. During the sixties and seventies, a number of community activists of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements advocated for and built some of the 14 housing complexes scattered strategically throughout the neighborhood in anticipation of coastal development. These buildings, called the Holiday Venice apartments, were federally subsidized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and represented some guarantee that African Americans would be able to “hold their ground” in the face of development interests.⁵

While the presence of HUD-subsidized housing long deterred new development, the eclipse of the 40-year HUD contracts in the 1990s raised hopes among developers

that the complexes would be converted to market-rate housing. This possibility concurrently stirred anxiety among low-income residents who feared that their homes would be lost to high prices. Community activists and several tenants associations including one based among HUD subsidy recipients and another comprised of African American and other longtime homeowners and tenants voiced their concerns over the future of Venice for minorities and the poor. For many who shared the experience of advocating for affordable housing, gentrification came to represent a dangerous threat to the maintenance of an historic community and all that it had fought for. Since the contest over space became concentrated in such a small area, social conflict became that much more intense and interpersonal.

Poverty, crack, and criminality

The introduction of crack cocaine in the mid-1980s had a profound impact on the physical and social health of the neighborhood. Addiction to money at the top and addiction to the drug at the bottom maintained a symbiotic relationship between dealers and users. The addictive power and the affordability of crack cocaine led to an increasing demand for the substance. The growing addiction had traumatic effects on the families and acquaintances of users. Poverty, particularly among children, insured a steady supply of workers willing to take the front-line risk for older, high-volume dealers. It is important to note that not all drug dealers were associated with gangs, nor were all gang members involved in illegal drug activity. For some gangs including those involved in the gang war, however, the drug economy provided a steady income for many of its members.

While residents across groups demonstrated serious concern over drugs, related violence, and crime, the response to it was highly divided along racial lines. One of the effects of gentrification was the increase in a constituency concerned with the impact of crime on public safety and property values. New property owners and real estate interests exerted pressure on law enforcement officials to “clean up” Oakwood of the robberies, drug dealing, and vandalism which occurred at seemingly higher rates as compared to surrounding areas. A vocal group of homeowners took a visible role in speaking out against drug dealing on public streets and sidewalks. Some of them cooperated with police to videotape criminal activity from their homes. Individuals who cooperated with police were ridiculed by gang members and affiliates as “snitches.” Some of these individuals experienced personal retaliation for the role they were perceived to play. Since almost all of those seen as working closely with police were

middle-aged White homeowners and almost all of those seen as violating the law were either Latino or African American young men, schism along those differences intensified over time.

Race tended to supersede many other boundaries in cases of policy controversy related to crime and security. One controversy concerning safety and security centered on the contracting of the Nation of Islam for security services in the HUD-subsidized apartment complexes. In fall 1992, the Nation of Islam (NOI) was selected to provide non-armed security. Initially, crime went down. Police, however, expressed concern that the Nation would bring nationalist ideology to the residents and fuel resentment against police. Others felt that they may alienate Latino and white residents who lived in the buildings. Neither was proven to be the case. The Jewish Defense League spearheaded a challenge to the Nation of Islam which brought in larger ideological and political debates that were related to national debates between NOI leader Rev. Louis Farrakhan and outspoken Jewish organizations over what numerous Jewish groups felt was anti-Semitic ideology within the Nation. The controversy over building security became conflated with issues of anti-Semitism. The net result, however, was a deepening of divisions along racial cleavages. Eventually, the security contract with the Nation of Islam was terminated since many outstanding questions remained as to whether or not *non-armed* security was effective and as police came to believe that the Nation succumbed to fear of gang members.

Meanwhile, African American residents who were active in the local block clubs (neighborhood watch groups) were concerned about crime and had kept the block clubs active over several decades. While they tried to work with police to reduce criminal activity, they also believed that police misconduct against African Americans and other minorities needed to be stopped and that job training, recreational and other opportunities for gang members could offer an alternative to illegal activities. They were vocal in the chorus of those who argued that families and agencies need to work together to resolve the myriad of social and economic problems which lead to criminal involvement. While many residents, government agents, and community activists agreed with this general concept, cooperation was often difficult to achieve given the complex social history and persistent inequalities in the neighborhood.

The socioeconomic and demographic trends among Oakwood residents between 1970 and 1990 reveals growing demographic, cultural, and economic diversity. Longtime residents have aged while more recent newcomers are young. There is a

greater gap between those who are wealthy and those who are not. The racial balance has also shifted, with a sharp increase in Latino immigrants, a decrease in African American residents, and a slight increase in white residents. The poor are comprised of all racial groups, but are disproportionately Black and Latino. Those who are financially better off tend to be disproportionately white, though not exclusively.

The demographic characteristics of Oakwood as documented in the 1990 US Census of the Population reflects the increase in income polarization and shift in racial and ethnic composition. While the median household income rose from approximately \$18,700 in 1980 to \$25,300 in 1990⁶ (1990 dollars), the proportion of children under the age of 18 who lived under the poverty line grew to almost 40 percent. One-quarter of all Oakwood residents live below the poverty line, though some racial groups have a higher poverty rate than others (See Table II). Latinos (28 percent), African Americans (26 percent) and Native Americans (36 percent) have a relatively higher rate of poverty in comparison to Whites (20 percent) and Asian Americans (12 percent).

Table 4.2

Percentage of Residents with Incomes
Below the Poverty Line, Oakwood, 1989

All persons	25.0%
Children < 18	39.1%
White	19.5%
Black	26.1%
Am. Indian	36.0%
Asian/PI	12.3%
Hispanic	28.1%

Source: US Bureau of the Census, Census of Population and Housing, 1990.

The high rate of poverty accompanied a low level of formal educational attainment. Forty-five percent of residents 25 years of age and older had not graduated from high school. Among Oakwood's residents, immigrants comprised over one-third (37 percent), the majority of whom were born in Mexico or elsewhere in Central America. In addition, nearly one-third (31 percent) of Latinos did not speak English well or spoke none at all. A shrinking proportion of the population are homeowners. In 1970, about one-third of the housing units were owner-occupied, but by 1990 that proportion fell to less than one-fifth.

Community organizations

Oakwood was rich in community associations and activities. Many of these associations and activities involved residents of different backgrounds. However, differences in income level, race, education, language, culture, gender, religion, home ownership and length of residence in the area were still reflected in the composition of organizations and participation in many community activities. The composition of civic groups and associations is shaped by common preferences, interests, and social networks. There were occasions when gatherings were more homogeneous and others which were more diverse. For example, there were five Christian churches in the Oakwood area which were predominantly African American in membership while several Catholic churches had predominantly Latino congregations. At the same time, activities held at each of the churches often brought together residents of all racial backgrounds together such as weddings, funerals or preschool programs. Sports leagues tended to be racially homogeneous. For example, the local football league involved mainly African American youth, while young Latino males gravitated towards soccer, though both did share time together on the basketball court.

Race, class and gender would often intersect in defining the composition of groups or group leadership. The Oakwood Homeowners and Tenants Association (OHTA) was comprised of residents of the HUD-subsidized apartments, long-time homeowners, many of whom were older African American residents, and others who had participated in some of the civil rights activities in the sixties and seventies. Members of this resident association came into conflict with the more recently organized Oakwood Property Owners Association (OPOA), comprised exclusively of those who owned property in Oakwood. Class differences were the primary cleavage between these two quite outspoken groups, as both were racially inclusive. However, the visible leadership and active core of OHTA were older African American women, while that of OPOA were younger white men.

There were numerous organizations based in and around the neighborhood that served the needs of many low-income residents and children. Most of these service organizations were racially inclusive of all residents and supported racial cooperation to varying degrees. Two of the oldest grassroots service organizations were the Pearl White Theater (PWT) and the Community Service Organization (CSO). Both had been active during the Civil Rights Movement, conducting voter registration drives,

organizing block clubs, organizing activities for youth, and providing various social services. Other organizations such as Venice Teen Post, LIEU-CAP, Oakwood Wesley House, and Venice Boys and Girls Club also involved residents and provided valued services throughout the years. In addition, many other institutions which served the Oakwood neighborhood were located there or in close proximity. These included the Oakwood Park and Recreation Center, Venice Skills Center, Westminster Elementary School, Broadway Elementary School, Venice Family Clinic, Venice Arts Mecca, Venice Community Housing Corporation, and Positive Alternative Choices Today, among others. In 1992, representatives from a portion of those groups listed above formed a coalition called Oakwood United, initially convened as an information and resource sharing network and which later embarked on a small economic development venture.

The two organized gangs with members in Oakwood were the V-13 and the Venice Shoreline Crips (VSLC). As mentioned in a previous chapter, the V-13 were predominantly Latino while the Shoreline were predominantly African American, though both had a few exceptions. Oakwood was a major hub for the Shoreline since many of their activities, legal and illegal, were concentrated there. Also, many of those who assumed influential roles in the Shoreline were historically from the Oakwood neighborhood. The Shoreline also had a presence in the Mar Vista Gardens housing project but were a diminishing force as the number of African American families who resided there decreased over time. The V-13 also had a strong presence in Oakwood, but their activities were dispersed throughout a larger geographic area. The V-13 were more tightly organized than the Shoreline. Both had a fairly large street membership with different levels of involvement or commitment and both had various subgroups or cliques organized by age, location or friendship ties.⁷ The age of affiliates ranged from young adolescents to those in their forties or fifties.

While many of the social service organizations mentioned earlier served what some call “at-risk” youth, there were several agencies that worked specifically with gang-involved youth. Project Heavy West (PHW) was a local non-profit agency focused on gang prevention activities such as counseling, tutoring and peer mediation skills. Community Youth Gang Services (CYGS) was a county-funded agency based in East Los Angeles which hired gang intervention workers in other parts of the city, including an outreach worker for the Venice area. In addition to gang prevention and gang intervention workers, various law enforcement personnel worked in the

neighborhood. State parole workers and county probation workers had Venice residents as part of their caseloads. Police, city attorneys and district attorneys were also involved in Venice. More on the activities of law enforcement agencies will be covered in chapter 5.

Even though the Oakwood neighborhood was rich in organizational and institutional resources relative to more isolated urban areas, long-standing conflicts and competition over resources, particularly between community based organizations and human services agencies, made meaningful cooperation even more difficult to achieve. Several policy changes over the previous decade contributed to the alienation between many social service agencies and some of the more vocal and active residents of Oakwood associated with grassroots community groups. Cutbacks in social program funding and changes in funding patterns made it more and more difficult for grassroots community organizations to compete for public monies. Funding criteria shifted in emphasis from community-based governance of social programs to the professional management and administration of service agencies. Funding cutbacks scaled back the number of programs. And a change in funding cycles at the city block grant level from one-year to three-year cycles favored larger and more stable organizations. Many of the more grassroots groups which lacked resources, technical expertise and professional credentials could no longer compete for shrinking resources. Ironically, the more professionalized organizations, while often very effective with their clients, tended to have less contact with those most marginalized, including gang-involved youth and their families.

Multiple historical memories

Visions of Venice and the folklore about events that have passed go back as far as social networks and institutions retell them. Each neighbor and each neighborhood network circulate their own recollections. These memories are as divergent as were the experiences of different class, racial, political and cultural segments of the community. However divergent, they live to shape the sentiments that people hold about their neighborhood and their images of its future. Some would like to see the preservation of their community of friends and relations, while others envision change and see themselves as part of its transformation. Economic change, demographic shifts, market forces, and government policies and institutions have helped to bring together people with different dreams and interests who play out their fate in view of their social

identities and collective memories. These references, in turn, reinforce networks of mutual support and obligation. They are part of the bonds that hold together social networks. They are also grounds for the situational formation of multiple publics -- groups who share interpretive frames by which they analyze the world around them and take collective action.

Throughout Venice's colorful history, events and interactions have forged both social bonds and social divisions that ebb and flow over time and circumstance. Some of the strongest bonds have been the most intimate, where people have extended their hand through the trials and tribulations of life and where understanding and acceptance remained free of moral judgment. There are many residents who have built bridges across which intimate crossings have been made. Inclusive social networks across racial, ethnic, class, and gender boundaries are evident. They can be seen at potlucks, school events, holiday activities and graduations. And they can be seen in the mix of people who gather at sacred or intimate events such as baby showers, weddings and funerals.

At the same time, there are polarizing forces which have maintained a level of social distance among various groups and individuals. These divisions may seem more apparent in recent times, as conflicts have arisen throughout various segments of the city population during the late eighties through the present mid-nineties. Sources of conflict include competition over increasingly scarce resources and battles over place and the use of space. These are coupled with ethnocentric movements which have capitalized on the frustrations created by macro-economic changes as well as an increasingly fearful and isolationist political climate. At the neighborhood level, conflict often was manifested in personalized attacks voiced publicly or privately against other individuals. The personalized nature of conflict made it even more difficult to resolve controversy over broader overarching social issues. A major stage-setting issue which influenced the formation of multiple publics during the gang conflict was crime and law enforcement policy. It is to this we now turn.

¹ The Census listed 33 "Negroes" in 1910 and 102 in 1920.

² US Bureau of the Census shows that 3,191 African Americans lived in census tracts 2732 and 2733 out of a total population of 8,228. Opposite to those two tracts across Lincoln Boulevard, two African Americans were found to live in tracts 2737 and 2738 out of a total population there of 6,027 (US Bureau of the Census 1960).

³ Adjusted for inflation using shelter CPI; estimation based on median house values for census tracts 2732 and 2733.

⁴ Several factors led to the growth of the African American population during the 1960s. One was the Watts uprising in 1968. A number of African American families who could afford to relocate moved to

surrounding areas further away from the central city. Venice became one of many destinations for the outmigration of African Americans. Another impetus for population increase was the construction of Interstate Highway 10. The freeway was routed through another minority neighborhood north of Venice. Many were dislocated and some moved to Venice. African Americans found a long established community whom they joined in making Venice their home. A rich network of African American social, political, and cultural organizations concentrated in Oakwood.

⁵ Interview with Robert Castile, 4 August 1994, Los Angeles.

⁶ Figures for median household income and median house value are approximations based on the figures for census tracts 2732 and 2733.

⁷ Los Angeles Police Department officers interviewed estimated the membership of the V-13, Culver City Boys and the Venice Shoreline Crips to be approximately 300 each, though they state the difficulty of having an accurate count of those members who are active at any given point in time.

CHAPTER 5

THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT AND THE RACIALIZATION OF CRIME

The policy environment can be said to lay the parameters of discourse and practice regarding a particular arena of public policy. In the case of the gang war, the shift in law enforcement policy discourse from an emphasis on crime prevention and criminal “rehabilitation” to an emphasis on punishment allowed for wider latitude in the access to techniques of power by law enforcement officers -- latitude in both legal and ethical terms. Accompanying this change in policy environment was a change in interface between government and certain segments of the Venice residential community, particularly those who came under greater law enforcement surveillance. In previous policy eras, there were many community-based social service workers, counselors, teachers and others who would intervene along with law enforcement personnel when youth or adults came into trouble with the law. The “tough on crime” campaign, however, resulted in the mobilization of a wider range of law enforcement agencies targeting neighborhoods such as Oakwood. Multi-agency law enforcement operations often took place with minimal coordination or consultation with community workers.

This chapter will focus on the rise in law enforcement power to control the activities of street gangs, including the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) “Oakwood Plan,” the specific police plan designed to address gang-related crime in Oakwood. I will highlight the racially-coded distinctions in “criminal elements” made by law enforcement agencies, particularly by high ranking officers within the Los Angeles Police Department, in order to understand the relationship between and among police, gangs, and residents as well as the social dynamics that operated during the war.

I argue that a change in interface between government and civil society coupled with a racialization of criminality -- in this case the racially defined and discriminatory policies towards the conflated problem of gangs, drugs and violence -- led to an increase in the salience of racial group boundaries. The change in interface and the racialization of criminality also fostered antagonistic relations between government agencies and distressed communities most affected by this change. As will be more apparent in following chapters, these developments reduced the ability of government agencies to more effectively intervene in the racialized gang war that later emerged. A description of the policy setting provides the backdrop to the outbreak of gang violence and the context within which we can understand the responses to such an event.

Moral panics and the crackdown on crime

Beyond the domain of what we often think of as “institutional”¹ factors affecting the making and implementation of policy are “policy environments”-- a broader set of social values and analytical and moral beliefs giving guidance to our daily judgments and use of discretionary powers. Policy environments not only influence the use of discretionary powers among those who are anointed them,² but also the range of discretion which is tolerated or allowed in society. An understanding of the policy environment provides the social context within which policy is made as well as the social norms, values, and understandings which guide its implementation.

Moral panics are a social phenomenon first coined by Stan Cohen and appropriately applied by Stuart Hall to explain the change in attitudes and political mood which swept British society in the 1960s.³ Moral panics describe a state of fear which captures the public in response to a perceived breach in the moral contract of a society. As put by Cohen who coined the term, “Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (cited in Hall p. 16 from Cohen, p. 28). Hall (1978) explained the social momentum of such panics and their power to transform policy surrounding the problem of ‘mugging’ in England⁴:

The police, media, and judiciary's roles point to the *social* nature of 'mugging' and the active roles that institutions play in defining situations, selecting targets, initiating 'campaigns', in structuring campaigns, in selectively signifying their actions to the public at large, in legitimating their actions through accounts of situations which they produce. They do not merely respond to 'moral panics,' but form part of the circle out of which they develop. Thus, they "*amplify* the deviancy they seem so absolutely committed to controlling" and thereby act out a script which they do not write. (p. 52)

Moral panics usually had the effect of increasing public consent for the use of state force in the intervention of activities defined as criminal.

Chambliss (1995) argues that the policy environment concerning the “gang problem” in the US was characterized by moral panic. This panic struck major metropolitan cities in the US over the problem of gang violence from the late seventies through the nineties, resulting in a gradual increase in gang suppression programs. The concern over gang-related crime was part of a growing preoccupation with crime

generally. A coalition of interests including conservative legislators, the crime control industry and the media fueled the moral panic in the US from the 1960s to the 1990s, tracing its roots to Barry Goldwater's 1964 Republican presidential campaign. Over time, numerous bills were passed to expand the powers and resources of law enforcement and criminal justice institutions. The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 and the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970 expanded law enforcement privileges and powers while weakening legal rights of the accused previously granted in Supreme Court decisions.⁵ Increased powers included wiretapping by federal agents and local police without a court order, admission of confessions by trial judges, grand jury investigations, and new federal sanctions and punishments.

By the early 1990s, a major federal crime bill was considered which pitted social welfare programs against crime reduction. While corporate flight, increased global competition, worldwide recession, and a restructuring of the economy and production processes further polarized rich and poor and caused great social dislocation, public discourse tended to focus on the conservative-dominated debate centered on the failure of individuals to assume personal responsibility for their actions. The Great Society and its legacy of social programs were blamed for the lack of personal responsibility assumed by its citizens. Crime, chaos, and disrespect for law and property were pointed to as symptoms of a liberal society gone overboard. In an atmosphere of moral panic, many argued that government needed to be "tough on crime" and less tolerant of any breach of the "moral contract."

The policy response logically flowing from this argument was an increase in the range of violations and in the severity of sanctions against individuals who would violate the rules of law. By the 1992 election year, candidates addressed the issue of crime as one of the major platform issues of the presidential race. In the following year, the most sweeping crime bill of this century was passed.

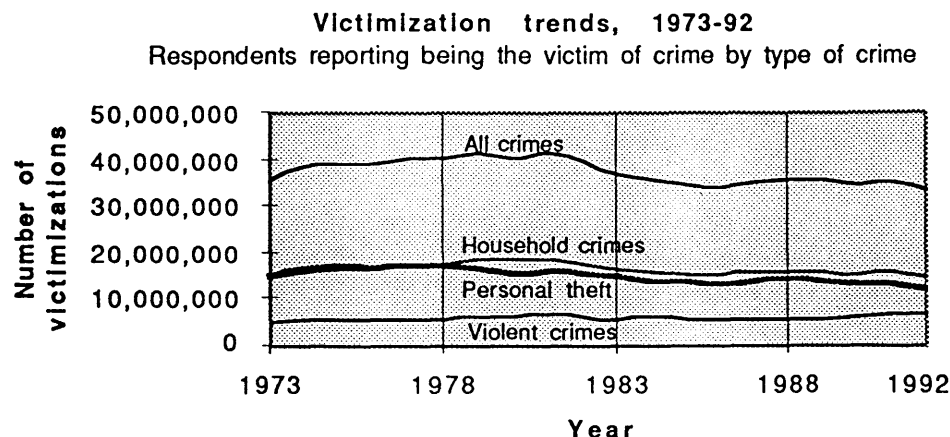
The crime bill included the "three strikes and you're out" mandatory life sentencing for the third felony offense, criminal offenses for certain gang memberships, and expansion of death penalty application to fifty-two additional offenses. It authorized \$8.9 billion to hire 100,000 police officers, \$3 billion for prison construction, \$3 billion for juvenile boot camps, \$100 million for school security, and \$1.8 billion to fight crimes against women. This increase in expenditures followed an already fivefold increase between 1972 and 1988 (Chambliss 1995).⁶ States also passed legislation

increasing law enforcement powers. California was among many states which passed, in 1989, the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (STEP; California Penal Code Section 186.20) which declared that an active participant of a criminal street gang who had knowledge of that gang's pattern of criminal activity and either promoted or assisted members of that gang in felonious criminal activity would be automatically guilty of a separate felony (Genelin 1993). Though stricter enforcement and individual responsibility may be important components of crime and poverty reduction, the shrinking economy made it that much more difficult for disadvantaged groups to make progress in the void of industrial and workforce policies to effectively facilitate a transition to meaningful work.

The moral panic portrayed the population of violent criminals as primarily Black, Latino, and immigrant Asian. The imagery of the Black criminal preying on vulnerable whites was powerfully used by then candidate George Bush in his 1988 bid for the presidency. He used photographs and oral references to Willie Horton in his campaign to emphasize his tough stance on crime. Willie Horton was an African American man who raped a white Maryland woman while he was on a work furlough during the time he was serving a sentence for a murder conviction in a Massachusetts state prison. The power of the racially-loaded image bespeaks the extent to which invasive and violent crime has become associated with particular racial groups, particularly African American males.

One feature of moral panics is the contradiction between facts and images. The panic of the 1980s was sparked by a perceived increase in the rate of violent crime. The flurry of campaign rhetoric about the rising rate of crime contradicted trends revealed by crime statistics which showed that the overall crime rate had not changed significantly since 1973 and, in fact, had decreased since 1980 as seen in Figure 5.1 (Chambliss 1995, Tomy 1995). Data collected by the Bureau of Justice Statistics and the FBI indicated that the rate of violent crime remained relatively stable between 1976 and 1992. Statistics showed that some categories of crime increased, but most of the increase in crime reported in the Uniform Crime Reports was due to an increase in the reporting of crime (Bogess and Bound 1993).

Figure 5.1



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, Criminal Victimization, 1992, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Justice, 1992

Incarceration rates have risen, but this does not necessarily indicate an increase in criminal activity. Bogess and Bound (1993) found that the increase was mainly due to an increase in the rate of incarceration per arrest. Though many gained the impression based on media reports that the increase in violent crime was perpetrated by racial minority males, the percentage of African Americans arrested for violent crimes⁷ during that period actually decreased slightly from 47.5 percent to 44.8 percent, while the proportion of whites arrested for those same crimes increased slightly from 50.4 percent to 53.6 percent (Torny 1995).

There are also inconsistencies between the touted solutions to the problem and proven experience with those remedies. In times of moral panic, politicians and law enforcement lobbies often advocate for tighter police control as the silver bullet to solve the problem of crime. History has shown, however that increased police powers do not necessarily lead to decreased crime (Jacob 1984, Torny 1995). The post World War II era was a boon for police, courts, and prisons; police expenditures tripled between 1948 and 1978, yet crime continued to surge.

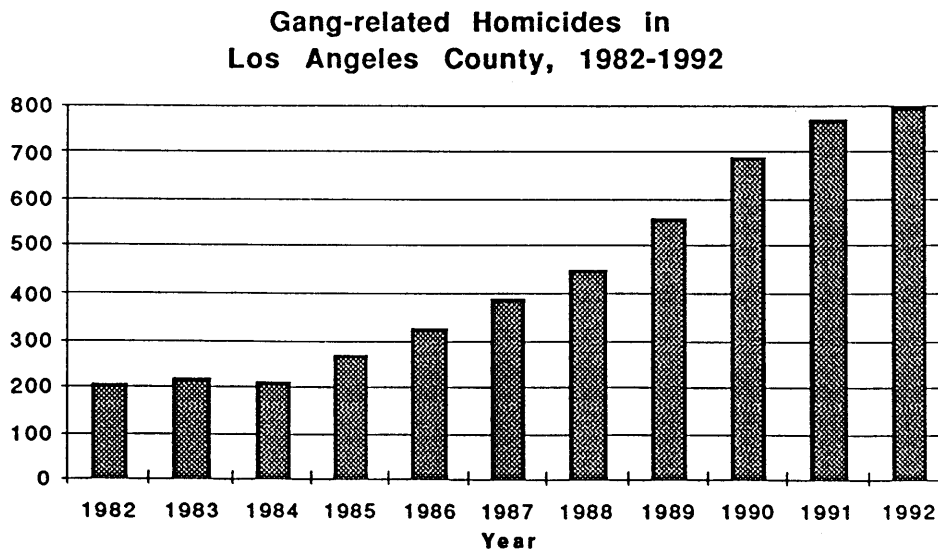
The “Gang Problem”

The increase in *gang-related* violence during the late 1980s in cities such as Los Angeles added further fuel to the growing fear of crime. While there was certainly concern over other types of crime, gang-related violence caught the attention of policy

makers and the broader public for several reasons. First, the victims of violent crime were oftentimes random. Many bystanders were falling victim to flying bullets fired in gang combat, especially during the spree of drive-by shootings in the late eighties and early nineties. Unlike white collar crime which also increased during this same period, acts of random violence naturally instilled greater fear among the populace. Second, gang-related violence made for sensationalistic news reporting. Tales of gang-related violence were spun into dramatic stories of greed, decadence, loyalty, innocence and family tragedy. Many of these stories filled the verses of popular rap music and scripts of dramatic films.

Third and most importantly, cities such as Los Angeles did experience a marked increase in gang-related homicide despite an overall decrease in violent crime as shown in figure 5.2. This increase was particularly marked in the eighties and early nineties. Since the early eighties, non-gang homicides declined while gang homicides in the county reached a high of 800 in 1992 from a low of 205 killed in 1982 (Katz 1991, 1993). The risk of random victimization, the romantic portrayal of gangs in the tradition of mobster legends, and the real increase in gang violence in selected US cities instilled widespread public concern.

Figure 5.2



Source: Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and District Attorney's Office

Throughout the 1980s, the increase in gang activity and gang-related violence gained national prominence. High-ranking government officials began referring to the “gang problem” as an issue of national security. Federal agencies developed proposals to address the problem including one to develop a national information database to track the movement and activities of suspected gang members. In a statement before the Congressional Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary in June 1992, Daniel M. Hartnett, then associate director of law enforcement of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, testified:

The close working relationships between the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and State and local law enforcement agencies enabled ATF to be one of the first in Federal law enforcement to identify these violent gangs as not just a threat to one city or one localized area, but as a national threat, one that had to be dealt with at the national level.⁸

Henry J. Hyde, a member of the subcommittee and a representative from Illinois, responded to ethical concerns over the federal government gathering such information:

... I dare say, in time of national stress and security issues approaching even war, who is to say we are not at war today in some of our cities? War has been declared by some people against this society -- membership in the Nazi Party, just for example. I would be more comforted knowing that our intelligence services knew who the Nazis were back in, say, 1941, 1940, 1939.⁹

Los Angeles was seen as a center from which the “gang problem” emanated nationally. Former LAPD Chief Daryl Gates warned that “cities of all sizes throughout the United States are now threatened either by an influx of Los Angeles-area gang members or by local gangs attempting to establish dominance” (Gates 1990). One of the characteristics of contemporary gangs as described by Hartnett of the ATF was that “this new breed of criminals were highly mobile, with their activities spanning state and regional boundaries.”¹⁰

The proliferation of gangs became a metaphor for a more overarching crisis of American demise.¹¹ The breakdown of the family, the deterioration of moral values, the decadence of greed, and the failure of liberal social policies originally designed to stem these problems were problems associated with the rise in gang violence. Gangs were proclaimed to be an illness crippling our society. As the 1989 California State Task Force on Gangs and Drugs quoted Sacramento County District Attorney John

Dougherty, "The situation has been called narcoterrorism, a blight, an epidemic, an infection, and perhaps the health analogies are correct, because gangs and drugs attack the community body as other diseases attack the human body."¹²

In the public discourse over drugs and gang-related crime, three problems were conflated in the popular media. Gangs, drugs, and violence were assumed to be intertwined. One was thought to naturally accompany the others. Not only did the three problems come to mean the same thing, the increase in one problem inferred an increase in the other two. But research has shown that the relationship among gangs, drugs and violence is more complex than popularly perceived. Though there is a higher rate of violence among gang members and a greater frequency of violent offenders among gangs, not all gang members participate in acts of violence. According to the Los Angeles District Attorney, one-half of all gang members do not participate in violence; the other one-half participates in violence which is "minor or isolated in most cases" (Reiner 1992, p. iii). Furthermore, it is not clear whether or not the increased frequency of gang-related violence reflects the extent to which a) gangs are becoming more violent, b) there has been a rise in the number of gangs, or c) there has been a general increase in societal violence. It is also recognized that there are oftentimes a few members of any gang who instigate acts of violence and that violence is not necessarily the preferred *modus operandi* among the vast majority of gangs or gang members (Jankowski 1991).

There is a similarly complex relationship between gangs and drugs. Not all gangs participate in the sale of narcotics and not all narcotics are distributed by gangs (Klein and Maxson 1994). Moreover, most local experts agree that gangs in Los Angeles are not evolving into organized distribution rings (Reiner 1992). For those gangs who engage in drug sales, however, the profits from sales do enable them to purchase high-powered weapons. The increase in firepower can shift the balance of power between gangs and result in a higher rate of casualties due to the accuracy and power of more sophisticated weaponry, posing a special danger to law enforcement officers who may be out-armed.

From racializing crime to criminalizing race in Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) was looked to as the major institution responsible for maintaining law and order locally. During the gang war, the LAPD was one of the lead agencies in the implementation of gang suppression operations. But increased powers and an expanded law enforcement infrastructure for

gang suppression was not limited to the LAPD. Special gang units were established in almost every law enforcement agency in the region. Additionally, federal agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) shifted resources to gang intelligence and enforcement. As of 1992, the ATF had committed over one-third of its special agents to investigate “violent gang groups.”¹³

Los Angeles became known as the gang capital of the country and was most well known for African American, Latino, and Asian street gangs. Images of gang life were popularized in films such as *Boyz in the Hood*, *American Me*, and *Enter the Dragon*.. Many popular images promoted stereotypes of gangs that were ethnic-specific. These stereotypes were often reproduced by law enforcement officials, media, and gangs themselves. Law enforcement depiction of various racial and ethnic specific gangs greatly influenced public perceptions (Hall et. at. 1978). Though portrayals of various gangs by racial composition may contain a grain of truth, they have created racial images which have serious consequences for government policies directed towards gang-related problems in each community and towards ethnic and racial groups generally.

The predominantly African American Shoreline Crips was seen by law enforcement agencies as one of the most notorious gangs in Los Angeles. They were also one of more than twenty gangs in Los Angeles county targeted by the FBI for investigation of federal violations following the civil unrest in 1992.¹⁴ Locally, the LAPD also identified the Shoreline along with the predominantly Latino V-13 as a source of a large proportion of criminal activity in the Venice area. Oakwood had been designated a Gang Related Active Trafficker Suppression (GRATS) hot spot.¹⁵ The LAPD’s GRATS program was launched in 1988 “to focus on the narcotic aspect of the Black street gang problem.”¹⁶ For the LAPD’s Pacific Division located in the westernmost division in the LAPD’s jurisdiction, Oakwood was a major focus for police operations.

Though law enforcement agencies acknowledge that White gangs are among the most violent, these gangs have not garnered the attention that minority street gangs in urban areas have in the media. The Los Angeles Police Department estimates that there are approximately 370 “outlaw motorcycle gangs” in California, more than 100 of which are criminally active. In the California prison system, white supremacist prison gangs are seen as most vicious. According to the Los Angeles Police Department’s Gang

Awareness School training manual, "the Aryan Brotherhood (AB) is the most violent of the prison gangs."¹⁷

In Los Angeles, gang membership is more frequently homogeneous in racial composition. There are some neighborhoods where gang membership may be racially mixed, but they are more the exception than the norm. This characteristic of gangs is in contrast to many mid-western region organizations such as those in Chicago which tend to be multiracial in composition. The racial homogeneity of Los Angeles gangs has to do with their historical development, including the pattern of immigration and the wide expanse of residentially segregated neighborhoods. Cultural, economic, and demographic differences between various gangs have given each distinct styles and modes of operation.

Former LAPD chief Daryl Gates (1990) described the problem of gang violence in Los Angeles in an article published in *The Police Chief*. Titled "Gang violence in L.A.," the article describes the growing danger that gang violence posed to the public and the enforcement measures that the LAPD took in response. In it, he focused on Black and Latino gangs and distinguished between them:

Differences between the black and Hispanic gangs became apparent early on. The violent crimes committed by the traditional turf- or neighborhood-oriented Hispanic gangs were typically centered around long-standing rivalries. Indeed, some of the feuds have gone on for generations.

Although black gangs also engaged in interring battles, it was obvious that they shared a common goal that set their criminal activity apart from the traditional gang-against-gang battles. The thrust of the black gang actions both then and now is the premise that money buys power, which is then enforced through violence. Those who have something the gang member wants--even if they have very little--are the quarry for the predatory black street gang members. Black gang member activity started with robberies within their own neighborhoods and then expanded to include more affluent areas where victims and money are more plentiful. It has been said that a Hispanic gang member will die for his "dirt," while a black gang member dies for his "gold." Gang homicide reports attest to the accuracy of this statement. (p. 20)

In this article and other documents of the LAPD, this distinction between Black and Latino gangs is reiterated. The LAPD Gang Awareness School Training Materials in describing Hispanic gang members states, "Hispanic gangs invariably name their gang

after a geographical area or 'turf,' something they feel is worth fighting for and defending. Foremost in each gang member's mind is the belief that 'the gang is more important than the individual member'."¹⁸ In contrast, African American gangs were described as more prone to violence and more concerned about material gain. The training manual states, "They are not considered turf gangs and are more involved in crimes for profit.... The gang members (sic) violent criminal activity was made more severe by an increased narcotics supply in the City and the tremendous profit potential in street sales."¹⁹

Black gangs are portrayed as dangerously preoccupied with the pursuit of material gain to the point that they pose a greater threat to society. In contrast to "traditional gang-against-gang" battles, Black gangs are seen to prey on the non-gang community and rove outside of central city boundaries to "more affluent" areas. They are seen to victimize the poor and rich alike with no regard for the rights and well-being of others. "Hispanic" gangs, on the other hand, are portrayed as often operating as a "family affair." Implicit in this description is the perception that they are more humane since "family values" and the familial structure are maintained albeit within the culture of the gang. Police officers specializing in gang-related crime see this characteristic as a stabilizing force as family members can help mediate rivalries which may get out of hand.

One LAPD officer in a specialized gang unit which operates in Oakwood described this difference between Black and Latino gangs:

Now the Hispanics are a very close, family-connected, you know, organization. Hispanic gangs, not all of them, the ones in Oakwood are very visible; very, very strong family ties.... The family structure is interwoven into this, you know, criminal organization. Now, in the same family, you could have somebody who is, you know, very legitimate. The daughter is a legal secretary and has a job, you know, and the aunt is, you know, a nurse or something. I mean, you know, there's a lot of, I mean, these people work for a living too, you know. And then, one brother's a hype and all he does is shoot drugs all day, you know. And the other is maybe a part-time burglar, you know. And then the others, like, real involved in criminal sales of cocaine and murder and other things. So, just within a whole family group there's a whole structure....

Now the Black side, ...the family structure isn't there. The families, when we talk about families, they have the same name, but boy, it's not, I mean,

there's no father present. There's no grandmothers present like there used to be in the traditional Black family, you know. Literally, it's just people coming in and out, you know, so you don't see the family structure in the Black groups.²⁰

Many leading law enforcement officials distinguish between African American and Latino gangs in their assessed danger to society. The LAPD top brass has long held the belief that African American gangs are a greater menace to society due to a supposed drive for money as quoted earlier, as well as a perceived predisposition to violence and a history of political resistance as demonstrated in the social movements of the 1960s. More so than gangs comprised of Latinos, Asians and Whites, Black gangs are portrayed as lacking moral judgment and of having little respect for human life. Then-chief Daryl Gates (1990) wrote:

Violence is a given for all gangs. What is it, then, that sets the black street gangs apart? Although the fixation on crime for profit is one difference, *by far the more significant difference lies in what seems to be a total disregard for human life--including their own.*²¹ (emphasis added)

This blanket statement places all Black men suspected of gang involvement in a particular category of individuals who are seen as beyond the reach of human integrity or moral persuasion. Black gangs are characterized as having no moral code of conduct which may inhibit their quest for money and power. Coupled with the concern over increasing attacks on police officers, the image of African American gang members shaped police behavior towards Black male suspects and affected their interaction with African American residents more generally.

This view towards African American gangs is, in part, based on homicide statistics. But while statistics may show a higher rate of gang-related homicides among African Americans, it is a leap in logic to conclude that all African American gang members lack respect for life. For instance, one alternative explanation may be that leadership figures in Latino gangs tend to have greater control over the actions of their members. Disciplinary procedures and acquiescence to higher organizational bodies or leaders may be more strictly followed by Latino gangs. A higher rate of gang-related homicides may mean that individual members of African American gangs are less constrained by a more collective organizational structure. To conclude, however, that Black gang members as a whole have "total disregard for human life" paints a dangerous image of all African American youth identified as gang-related with little room for differentiation among them.

The danger of these types of descriptions is that they so powerfully reinforce a set of popular cultural stereotypes that serve as a cognitive map for officers who may not have a deeper understanding of the life experiences, histories, cultures, and sensibilities among diverse groups in US society. In the case of Oakwood, this perceived difference between African American and Latino gangs reinforced and served to “explain” patterns of criminality that police observed.

The one-dimensional portrayal, however, has resulted in a disturbing dichotomy made between the gang and non-gang society. This has led to a sense that the loss of a gang member's life is somehow less of a loss than that of an “innocent” victim. There is a grave danger in the categorical objectification and devaluation of a group of individuals. It is an all-too familiar process which, if taken to its logical conclusion, leaves little discourse for policies which explore more hopeful alternatives for the problem of gang-related violence.

Gang suppression policies

During the eighties and nineties, an infrastructure was established to put controls on gang members and gang-related activities. This infrastructure included a series of legal reforms and the establishment of institutional structures to operationalize them. The 1993 Crime Bill capped a major shift in criminal justice policy. Juvenile justice policies have swung like a pendulum between the extremes of lenient and harsh punishment.²² Over the last two hundred years, a cycle of policy shifts has been repeated three times (Thomas 1992). The cycle goes like this: Harsh punishment is instituted and causes the system to make a forced choice between harsh punishment and no action, subsequently prompting reformers to push for lenience in punishment. Eventually, crime is blamed on lenience and a new set of reformers push for harsher punishment.²³ However, between the two polarized positions there are some who believe that harsh punishment can be effective, but not without equal attention to prevention and rehabilitative measures along with mechanisms to insure fair application of policies across racial groups and class strata.

Juvenile justice policy today is largely determined by the ideas of the “get tough” movement advocating swift, certain and severe punishment for youthful offenders (Bernard 1992). High suppression approaches have become the dominant *modus operandi* for many police departments in their response to gang-related activity. Irving Spergel (1989:171) states that a principal assumption of gang suppression approaches

"is that gangs and gang members should not be tolerated or even helped." In contrast to periods in the cycle which emphasized "rehabilitation and reform," suppression era policies emphasize punishment and incarceration.

Klein (1993) explains that suppression approaches (including heightened surveillance, patrol saturation, area sweeps, special task forces, and targeted concentration of forces) have been developed in the context of four developments: a) a growing acknowledgment that treatment/rehabilitation approaches have been unsuccessful; b) the growth in gang intelligence gathering sophistication which has reduced questionable arrests and increased gang detail officer morale; c) the emergence of gangs in several hundred American cities and their expansion in size and violence in gang hubs such as Los Angeles that have created pressures resulting in the legitimization of suppression approaches; and d) supplemental anti-narcotics tactics (including "buy-busts," reverse stings, multi-jurisdictional task forces, civil abatement procedures, and technical hardware developed for fast entry into crack houses) inspired by real and purported gang involvement in drug distribution.

Specific gang suppression operations have been established in big cities across the country, including Los Angeles.²⁴ Taken as a whole, they employ the following measures: 1) increase the "zone of violation" under which gang members can be arrested and increase penalties for gang-related crimes; 2) increase powers of law enforcement agencies to investigate and arrest identified gang suspects; 3) create specialized units in various agencies to focus specifically on gang-related crime; 4) set up anti-gang task forces to coordinate the work of various arms of law enforcement; 5) establish information systems to track the movement of gang members and their activities; and 6) devise special operations designed to quell gang activities.

Other components of what has been termed high-suppression policy have been developed at the state and local level. Klein (1993) outlines specific programs which have been established in Los Angeles. They can be summarized as follows:

1. *LAPD's Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH)* and Los Angeles Sheriff's Department *LASD Operation Safe Streets (OSS)* - The police and sheriff departments each have special officers who work in gang patrol units throughout the city and county respectively. CRASH stresses high visibility surveillance and suppression activities and conducting follow-up investigations of gang-related arrests. OSS places more emphasis on intelligence gathering and maintains a county-wide gang database.

2. *Gang sweeps* - Operation Hammer is the most well known of the types of gang sweeps conducted by the LAPD. Most often conducted in the South Bureau (covering the South-Central area of Los Angeles), between 200 to 2,000 officers crack down in a particular area, with a typical sweep resulting in several hundred arrests for violations ranging from misdemeanors to more serious crimes.
3. *Operation Hardcore* - The Hardcore Gang Unit of the District Attorney's office supervises a vertical prosecution program aimed at gang leaders and homicide suspects. Hardcore Deputy District Attorneys seek high conviction rates and maximum sentences for suspects identified as members of gangs.
4. *Specialized probation and parole programs* - The Los Angeles County Probation Department and the California Youth Authority assign gang-identified probationers and parolees to specialized officers with reduced caseloads to allow for closer supervision.
5. *Street Terrorism Enforcement Program (STEP)* - Enabled by the California state legislature, the STEP Act allows for more severe punishments for suspected gang members, on the condition that they be given formal notice of their suspected affiliation.
6. *Civil gang abatement* - Civil statutes, including building codes, zoning rules, nuisance laws and rules of assembly are used by the Office of the City Attorney to harass and discourage gang and drug activity operating out of specific locations within city limits.
7. *School-centered suppression programs* - In addition to prevention and education programs, the LAPD in conjunction with the Los Angeles Unified School District conducts regular undercover drug buys on campuses. Schools are also employing stricter expulsion policies, closed campuses, metal detectors, and armed security guards.

Controversy over gang suppression policy

There is ongoing controversy among law enforcement agents, policy makers and the general public over the effectiveness and appropriate use of high suppression approaches to quell gang violence. While many agree that the focused and coordinated assault by law enforcement agencies on high-crime neighborhoods may be effective in certain situations, the general approach as well as the selection of appropriate situations

and the frequency of their use remain hotly debated. Four major problems concerning gang suppression approaches have been identified: 1) overlabeling youth as being gang members, 2) unintended results and "boomerang" effects, 3) misuse of discretionary powers, and 4) questionable long-term effectiveness of such approaches.

"Overlabeling" is the problem of identifying individuals as gang members even though they may not be. Across the spectrum of law enforcement agencies, specialized gang control units have been created (Needle and Stapleton 1983). These special units may be a two-edged sword, as their establishment and expansion may contribute to overlabeling (Huff and McBride 1993). Hagedorn (1988) and Huff (1989, 1990) have noted that some gang members have attributed their first real identification with a gang to overlabeling by law enforcement. Anderson (1990) discusses the problem of labeling in terms of color-coding, expressed in the person of the anonymous Black male who is often assumed guilty until proven innocent. Labeling by others can shape or reinforce an image of the self or nurture an "oppositional" identity based on a rejection of the norms of a dominant group (Ogbu).

A second problem heightened by suppression approaches is what Klein (1993) refers to as "boomerang" effects. He asserts that messages relayed in deterrence and suppression approaches are blocked or reinterpreted by group processes. He expresses concern that gang suppression programs may backfire as their implicit message and deterrent properties may be altered by the receiving gang members. He cites longitudinal research which indicates that peer pressure is the most important proximal contributor to drug and delinquency involvement. He also cites research by Moore and Vigil (1989) who suggest that gangs maintain an oppositional subculture. Klein fears that suppression approaches "may deter a few members but also increase the internal cohesiveness of the group," resulting in a "boomerang" effect (p. 107). The identification of gangs based on race as one of the most immediate markers is an important aspect of potential backfire. Elijah Anderson (1990:196) notes that "because the young black man is aware of many cases when an 'innocent' black person was wrongly accused and detained, he develops an 'attitude' toward the police." Klein and Maxson (1994) observed that drug suppression tactics such as the massive street sweeps conducted by the LAPD, when simultaneously declared as part of the "war" on gangs, may only heighten gang identity and status. Additionally, they warn that the national gang identification roster system may have the side effect of increasing gang cohesiveness. Many have questioned the benefits and ethics of a national gang

database, particularly in light of evidence that there may be individuals included in the database who are not active gang members (Reiner 1992).

A third concern expressed over suppression approaches lies in the increase in discretionary powers given to law enforcement officials and opportunities for unchecked abuse of powers. Numerous writings document police corruption (Duchaine 1979, Donner 1990). Increased powers given to corrupt or insensitive police only serve to create greater mistrust and conflict. The nature of institutional decision-making processes within law enforcement makes policing agencies vulnerable to abuses of power. In particular, juvenile justice policies are heavily dependent on "street level bureaucrats," to use Lipsky's (1980) term. Law enforcement agents possess greater discretionary powers than do other types of agencies due to the private and physical nature of contact between officers and civilians.²⁵

Finally, some argue that law enforcement agencies that rely solely on suppression approaches are unlikely to be effective in the longer term because a) new gang members may simply replace those arrested owing to similar unmet needs and the continuing availability of criminal opportunities and b) where incarceration follows conviction, the gang problem often is partially displaced into the correctional system as gang members become active inside the institutions, only to return to the community and resume their activities with the gang (Huff and McBride 1993).

Jankowski (1991) argues that a major problem of gang suppression policy is that it does not approach the problem in terms of the individual and collective aspects of the phenomenon. Law enforcement agencies do not always understand the organizational dynamics and worldviews driving gang behavior. Nor do they always understand that the root causes of violence are such factors as individual fear, ambition, testing, and frustration, rather than the specific situation. Jankowski argues that it is important to understand the internal dynamics and thinking of gangs in order to effectively reduce gang violence.

In addition, traditional approaches to crime control may prove counterproductive in the long run if they undermine community values (Akerlof and Yellen 1994). This concern is based on the premise that community cooperation with local police is essential to law enforcement. Fear of reprisals, perceived consequences of weakening the local gang (i.e., outside gangs entering the neighborhood in absence of local gang), fairness of penalties (either too high or too low), and attitudes towards police are four factors which influence community cooperation with law enforcement. They note that gangs

have an incentive to commit crime right up to the point where people will cooperate with the police. The community's willingness to cooperate is heavily dependent on the approach that law enforcement entities take with regard to community relations .

Controversy over these and other issues continues to rage, due in part to the lack of more conclusive research and empirical evidence as to the outcomes of existing policies.²⁶ Huff suggests that "a continuing display of professionalism, personal concern, and fairness--both on the streets and during incarceration--can help curb gang involvement and encourage cooperation with law enforcement's gang control efforts" (Huff and McBride 1993, p. 409). But others do not completely agree. Jankowski (1991) argues that gangs and the community in which they operate establish a working relationship, each providing the other with certain services. Often, gangs fulfill the role of neighborhood militia, protecting residents from outside gangs or intruders. However, since gangs need community support more than the residents need them, they are usually subject to the will of the community. He found gangs to establish a similar exchange relationship with government officials and institutions, though in less intimate forms.

These controversies over the efficacy and fairness of gang suppression policies and the related war on drugs have created social division, especially in areas where these policy tools are applied. Those who believe claims of their effectiveness and necessity are at odds against those who protest their use. It is not necessarily the case that either side condones criminal behavior or racial bias. But those who oppose current practices are often accused of condoning crime. The choice between "tough love" and "criminal sympathizer" leaves no room for those who favor a policy response that is "tough" on crime but that also insures fairness in its application and offers viable alternatives in light of historic inequalities and injustices.

The Oakwood Plan

An LAPD plan called "The Oakwood Plan" was devised to eliminate gang violence, "remove" the criminal element, reduce the level of fear among residents, and establish long-term control over the crime problem in Oakwood. The Los Angeles Police Department was the main law enforcement agency which had a specific plan of operations for the neighborhood during late 1980s and early 1990s before the outbreak of the gang war. The plan called for a high suppression approach which relied upon a team of officers who comprised the "Oakwood Task Force" in close coordination with

other law enforcement agencies, particularly the Office of the City Attorney and the Office of the District Attorney.²⁷

The Plan reveals how the law enforcement problem in Oakwood was perceived and how the LAPD believed they could best address it. More importantly, it provides the context to understand the response of the LAPD to the gang war and their relations with African American and Latino residents. Though the written plan was an internal LAPD document, numerous African American residents in Oakwood had knowledge about the plan and its contents. Their understanding of the plan figured into their interpretation of events during the war as much as it reflected LAPD's approach to quelling the violence.

The Oakwood Plan was a 24-page document authored by LAPD's Pacific Division leadership along with key veteran officers in consultation with other affected agencies.²⁸ The plan was originally written in 1988-89 and later updated in December 1993.²⁹ The updated plan placed a greater emphasis on community-based policing following the mandate of Chief Willie Williams, the successor to Chief Daryl Gates. The following, however, describes the original plan launched in the late 1980s, as it reflects the policy environment at the outset of the gang war. The later shift in emphasis will be discussed in further detail in later chapters.

LAPD's definition of the problem

The plan states that an increase in the Black population, an exodus of whites and a movement of Hispanics to outer edges of Oakwood created a "racial imbalance" in the neighborhood. "When the Hispanics of the area, following the lead of the Hispanic gangs of downtown Los Angeles, formed alliances with each other for protection from the black community, it was just a matter of time until the blacks of Oakwood formed their own gangs. It was from these beginnings that the gangs began to change from alliances for protection, to criminal activity." The plan attributes gang rivalry to the sale and use of illegal drugs. This "rivalry between black and Hispanic gangs led to a divided community and several violent confrontations." (p. 5)

The LAPD leadership saw the crack cocaine trade in the mid-1980s correspond to an increase in shootings on police officers. This was a grave concern for the LAPD citywide and put them on defensive alert. The Plan explains:

During the last five (5) years, the introduction of an inexpensive form of cocaine, commonly referred to as rock, has done more to damage the Venice community than all of the other events combined. Violent criminal acts of a daily

basis are now the rule rather than the exception. Attacks on police officers, steadily on the rise since 1987, has (sic) been emphasized this year with three incidents wherein LAPD officers have been shot at while doing police work. (p. 5)

According to the text of the plan, there were eight assaults on police officers in Oakwood in the first four months of 1989 and six assaults in the first four months of 1988.

The Oakwood Task Force had dual and related purposes. One was to address safety concerns of officers by increasing the number of patrols and eliminating the need to rely on back up from other patrols in the 14.5 square mile division. This would enable the LAPD to accomplish its overall goals, including elimination of gang violence and visibility, removal of the "criminal element" and maintenance of long term control over the crime problem in Oakwood.

A plan which targets gangs in the geographic area of Oakwood will necessarily focus on the activities of the Venice Shoreline Crips (VSLC) over the V-13 because the activities of the Shoreline are concentrated in Oakwood. The plan mentions numerous Latino and "mixed race" gangs in the boundaries of the Pacific Division. Listings include the Venice 13 (V-13), Culver City Boys (CXC), Sotels (S-13), La Via (VIA), West Side Locos (WSL), which are largely Latino in composition, and the Suicidal Tendencies, the Pozers, Sex Jerks, and the King of Dukes which are described as mixed race gangs. But the plan goes on to state that "the primary problem gang in Oakwood is the Venice Shoreline Crips." (p. 7)

The Venice Shoreline Crips, or the Shoreline, is distinguished from other gangs by their integration in the social fabric of the local African American community. The Oakwood Plan states:

The Shoreline Crip community is different than any other black gang because of its homogeneous roots. Essentially, the gang is a web of criminal associations within a larger network of historical criminal association between about a dozen repeat offender families. The more the families of Oakwood are studied, the more it becomes apparent and the more you understand that almost everyone is related through either marriage or out of wedlock births." (p. 7)

Various families are named as "prominent criminal families where repeat offenders have spanned generations." (p. 7) Family relations are also mentioned to illustrate the degree of intermarriage within the community.

The "web of criminal associations" and the interrelatedness of families are viewed as problematic in several ways. One, many in law enforcement assume that families are reliant on the income generated from cocaine sales so that they will not report problems or offenses. Since everyone is seen as interrelated, officers have little faith that residents are not covering up for friends and relations.

But this view simplifies the much more complex nature of attitudes that residents hold towards police. Many African American residents interviewed, for example, would be willing to cooperate more closely with law enforcement officers to curb criminal activities if 1) there were more positive alternatives that youth could be steered towards, 2) if an attitude of greater respect was shown by officers towards members of the African American community, and/or 3) anti-discriminatory reforms were made in the establishment and enforcement of criminal laws. Many voiced sadness towards the deteriorating social effects of drugs on friends and relations, but did not feel empowered with their resources or abilities to make a significant turnaround. The "broken windows" approach of heavily enforcing minor infractions such as broken tail lights was often seen as making life harder and more burdensome for those who are struggling the hardest to survive, let alone trying to address some of these problems within the neighborhood.

The plan identified political organizations tied to African Americans of Oakwood, such as the Santa Monica chapter of the NAACP and the Rainbow Coalition, as problematic to the extent that they exerted political influence restricting the activities of the LAPD. These local organizations assisted residents' efforts to curb police misconduct by filing charges on behalf of residents. The implied "incestuous" behavior of gangs, residents and political organizations created tensions between law enforcement agencies and constituencies which would otherwise be considered "legitimate."

The characterization of the Shoreline Crips fits Daryl Gates' description of Black gangs as quoted in the previous section. The Oakwood Plan describes the Shorelines as "a confederation of cocaine selling groups bound together by loyalty to the neighborhood." (p. 8) The plan points out that one of the intersections in Oakwood is second in the ranking of locations of most active narcotics street sales citywide.

The plan expressed concern for the proliferation of automatic weapons made available by the sales of cocaine. This phenomenon was seen as responsible for the increased frequency of attacks on police officers. "The street sales of narcotics, guns, and stolen property cannot take place with the presence of police officers. The gang

member, who uses intimidation, fear and death to control rival gangs, victims of their crimes, and the neighborhood where they live, are attempting to use the same tactics on the officers who patrol the streets." (p. 9)

The "criminal element" in Oakwood is referred to in the language of the text as "predators". One of the patrol units was named the Pacific Area Predator Arrest Team (PAT). The Oakwood Plan states:

They are responsible for developing, maintaining and updating a list of those persons who by virtue of their demonstrated aggressive repetitive criminal behavior, can be classified as criminal predators. Secondly, once predators are identified, PAT personnel utilize every available Department resource, including this task force, to apprehend and prosecute the predators.

The plan goes on to state that:

Currently, PAT personnel have identified over thirty predators who either live in or apply their evil trade in Oakwood. Most of these individuals are also members of either the Venice Shoreline Crips or the Venice 13 gangs. Past police experience in Oakwood has determined that much of the criminal activity is being perpetrated by members of various criminal gangs. (p. 13)

A predator is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "1) one that preys, destroys, or devours and 2) an animal that depends on predation for its food." Taken together, the picture of the problem as painted by the Oakwood Plan depicts a group of preying criminals who pose a danger to law-abiding residents and police officers alike due to the violent behavior associated with the local drug trade.

While the definition of the problem as explained in the Oakwood Plan was based upon certain truths, it is still one definition among many alternatives that could have been chosen depending on the scope and selection of facts emphasized. One could have chosen to emphasize the rampant addiction throughout the region which drives the demand for drugs or the increased production of arms by the gun industry. If government agencies chose to emphasize the demand-side of the drug market, a different set of policy instruments and approaches would have been applied, including a public relations campaign, consistent targeting of drug *buyers* and drug rehabilitation programs. If one chose to emphasize the proliferation of firearms, gun-control policies would be more seriously considered. Depending on what facts one emphasizes in defining a problem, different solutions would appear reasonable. By focusing on the evils of gang members, the logical solution is to remove them from the neighborhood or

suppress their activities. Analytical connections to the myriad social problems connected to gang activity were not made in the original plan. Subsequently, the plan focused almost solely on suppression operations against suspected gang members.

The values and beliefs expressed in the Oakwood Plan were consistent with those held by many of the individual officers responsible for its implementation. An LAPD detective who specialized in gang-related homicides in Oakwood explained how the problem stemmed from the adoption of moral codes by many residents who condoned the use of violence:

You have to understand that in some of these groups, they truly don't morally believe the same things that you do.... Their value system is completely different. Oakwood is a prime example. They're very educated people. This is a conversation I had with a very educated man -- a white guy who lives in Oakwood, in his forties, went to Berkeley, all these good schools, and everything like that. And this is what he says. He says, "You have to understand that Oakwood requires a certain amount of violence in order...". And this is actually believed by the residents in Oakwood, the Black residents. And the idea is shared by many white people who are politically active, or something like that. That a certain amount of violence is absolutely necessary because it makes the neighborhood less desirable for development.... And, therefore, it is totally acceptable that there's an occasional killing, periodic shootings and drug dealings. It's completely acceptable, because it's a source of economic [relief]. So, there's a value structure that does not believe in the same values that are involved in the penal code.³⁰

It is true that crime lowers rents and makes housing prices more affordable for low-income residents. Some may indeed believe, as the officer assumes, "that's justification for a real value structure that doesn't believe that killing is wrong."³¹ Many residents may have accepted the fact that when one joins a gang, one assumes a set of risks, rewards and obligations that often demands violence and murder or ends in early death or physical injury. The implication, however, that African American and other residents in Oakwood operate on a value system that belittles the value of human life is very dangerous and leads to the loss of respect and humanity accorded them by those who assume that characterization.

The high suppression plan

The Oakwood Plan was a high suppression plan targeted towards gang members and their associates involved in criminal activity. The mission and objectives were outlined in two phases. They are excerpted as follows:

A. Phase I (Short Term)

1. Eliminate gang violence, visibility and neighborhood domination by maintaining a heavy and consistent police presence.
2. Target and remove criminal predators and conspicuous drug activity.
3. Reduce fear level in the community and among officers.

B. Phase II (Long Term)

1. Broad plan of coordinated police, community and government effort to maintain control of the criminal element.
2. Ongoing, long term effort to improve neighborhood conditions, i.e. removing those conditions that contribute to or encourage criminal behavior.³²

The long-term objective of improving neighborhood conditions included three tasks: 1) "continued emphasis on the identification, arrest and removal of criminal predators," 2) close monitoring of "potential drug buyers and those who sell drugs," and 3) continuation of a committee of residents and representatives of public service agencies to contribute ideas and resources including "exercising options available through the 'broken window' concept."

The execution of the plan included two phases. The first and major phase of the plan is summarized as follows:

1. Formation of the Oakwood Enforcement Task Force - A core of 20 LAPD officers in conjunction with Operations-West Bureau's CRASH unit (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums), and City and District Attorney's Offices would coordinate the arrest and prosecution of suspects. Detectives "will ensure that information on wanted and identified predators is made available to task force personnel." The District Attorney's Office will "commit to causing all filable felony cases to be filed as felonies instead of misdemeanors if at all possible." The City Attorney's Office "will commit to filing multiple misdemeanor counts if at all warranted causing Trial Deputies to ask for jail time when this appears to be in the best interest of the Oakwood community." And Parole and Probation Departments will commit

to keeping detectives advised on the status of parolees and probationers residing in Oakwood.

2. West Bureau CRASH was committed to sustain a presence in Oakwood.
3. The Pacific Area Predator Arrest Team (PAT) would identify and prosecute identified individuals, including numerous members of the Shoreline Crips and the Venice 13. Those individuals who may fall under the authority of the 1988 Street Terrorism Enforcement Act (STEAA) would have extended sentencing in state prison.
4. Specific personnel in the LAPD, District and City Attorney's offices would oversee the processing of crimes and arrests in Oakwood.
5. Other short range measures included the expedition of booking and processing of arrestees, record keeping support, anti-graffiti efforts, and the release of narcotics purchasers' names to local newspapers to discourage "customers" from buying narcotics in Oakwood. (p. 11-18)
6. Long range plans included the continuation of the Oakwood Community Advisory Committee and the implementation of "enforcement/control" measures. These included abatement of "nuisance" locations, intensification of investigative efforts on "known Criminal Predators," maintenance of graffiti eradication programs, and the initiation of a motorized footbeat when "deemed to be a reasonable safety risk." (p. 25-26)

The plan discussed the need for community feedback and support. LAPD brass recognized that community perceptions of their operations were important. The plan states:

Although this operation is designed to provide a high level of enforcement, it must not be viewed as an 'occupying force' by the general, law-abiding population. Officers who have demonstrated a strong service attitude would convey a positive attitude to the community and would reduce the negative perceptions which might arise from a continual presence.

Selection criteria for the Oakwood Task Force included knowledge of local gangs, narcotics expertise, history of "pro-active" enforcement, service attitude, and desire to join the task force. Ethnicity and personnel complaint histories would also be considered in the selection of officers.

The LAPD was not the only agency to eventually develop plans for Oakwood. The Shoreline Crips were also selected by the FBI as one of the target gangs in their

newly established operations following the spring 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles. As to why the Shoreline was targeted by law enforcement agencies, one director of an office under the L.A. County District Attorney stated:

I think the Shorelines have been targeted because they're considered to be one of the worst gangs... I remember the Shorelines were responsible for some crimes during the riots, and whether that influenced their selection then, or whether... I think the Shorelines had previously been a targeted gang anyway by LAPD, so that may have also influenced (pause) and then the increased level of violence, I'm sure, ultimately may have been a factor as well.³³

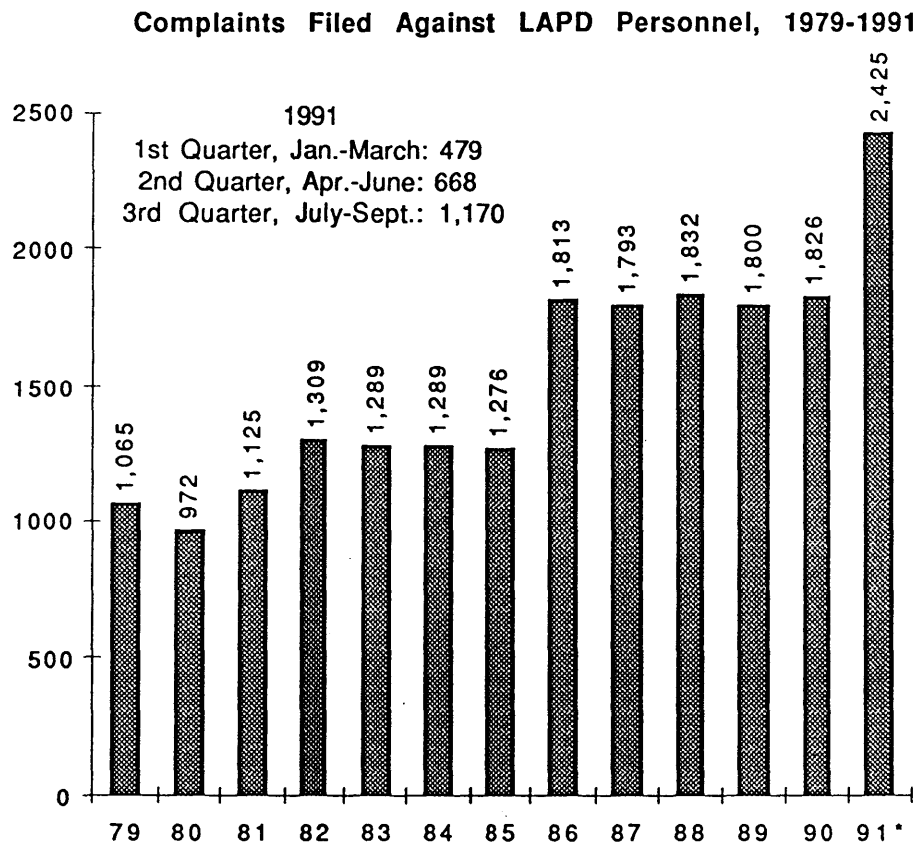
Controversy over LAPD practices

The LAPD itself has had a very controversial past. Scholars and insiders who have documented its history have portrayed it, not unlike many other police forces, as “protectors of privilege,” a militaristic organization which has served as one of the major agents of social control over the activities and movements of racial minorities in Los Angeles, particularly African Americans and Latinos (Donner 1990, Rothmiller and Goldman 1992). Controversy over LAPD practices has historically focused on officer misconduct and physical abuse of minority residents.

Two major investigations of LAPD practices in relation to incidents of civil unrest include the Kerner Commission Report in 1968 and the Christopher Commission Report in 1991. A similar type of investigation of the Los Angeles Sheriffs Department (LASD) was conducted and produced the Kolt Report in 1992. All raised a range of issues regarding law enforcement practices including personnel hiring, scope of discretionary policies, training, and internal enforcement of rules and regulations guiding officer conduct. Some of the major problems identified by the Christopher Commission included the use of excessive force, the ineffectiveness of internal LAPD investigations into police misconduct, and evidence of racism and racial bias among police officers. As shown in figure 5.3, the number of complaints filed against LAPD officers increased over 70 percent from 1,065 to 1,826 between 1979 and 1990. The number surged to 2,425 in 1991, the year the Christopher Commission Report was released (Murphy 1991). The Christopher Commission (1991) reported that of 2,152 citizen complaints of excessive force against LAPD officers examined which were filed between 1986 and 1990, only 42 (2 percent) were sustained.³⁴ Nearly one-third (30 percent) of 650 senior LAPD managers randomly surveyed by the Christopher Commission agreed that “the use of excessive force is a serious problem facing the

Department.³⁵ One-fourth (24.5 percent) agreed that “racial bias” (prejudice) on the part of officers toward minority citizens currently exists and contributes to a negative

Figure 5.3



*Figures for 1991 are through mid-October

NOTE: Figures listed for 1979-1989 are numbers of complaints processed and deemed “closed” by the department. Because of continuing investigations of some complaints, however, the figures exclude a small percentage of the total complaints received. The LAPD reports a surge in personnel complaints in 1991, making it a record year. Through mid-October, 2,425 complaints were filed against police by citizens and department personnel. About half of the complaints came after the release in early July of a highly critical report on the LAPD by the Christopher Commission. By contrast, fewer than 360 of the complaints were filed prior to the police beating of motorist Rodney G. King in March.

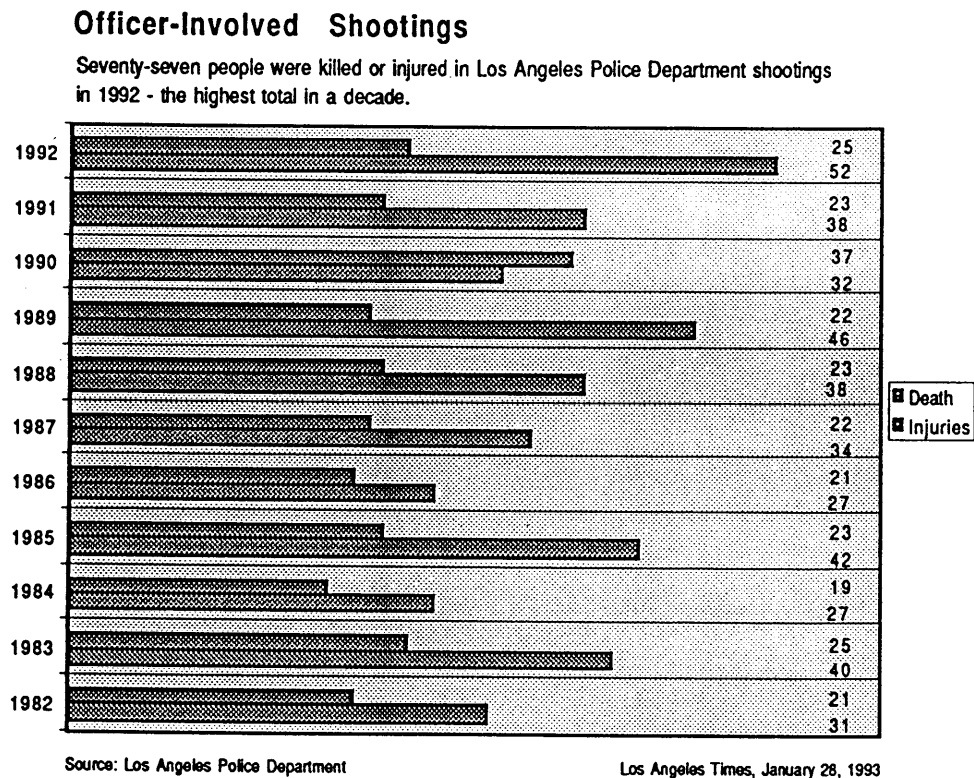
Source: LAPD, reported by the Los Angeles Times, October 17, 1991

interaction between police and the community. And more than one-fourth (27.6 percent) agreed that “an officer’s prejudice towards the suspect’s race may lead to the use of excessive force.”³⁶ Popular concern over the problem of excessive force grew with the

increase in officer-involved shootings. The number of people killed or injured by LAPD officers hit a to decade high in 1992 -- 25 killed and 52 injured.³⁷

While many of these investigations have focused on “aberrations” of LAPD policy, the root of controversy often lies in more systemic problems, such as institutional culture or the assumptions underlying a policy approach. One operating theory behind the high-suppression approach is referred to metaphorically as “broken

Figure 5.4



windows.” Coined by James Q. Wilson (1975:78), the “broken windows” theory was based on two assumptions: a) that public anxiety about crime is partly dependent on their sense that the street is “disorderly” and b) that “disorder and crime are usually inextricably linked, in a kind of developmental sequence.” One of the authors of the Oakwood Plan referred to “broken windows” as an underlying concept and shared her interpretation of the metaphor:

The broken window theory is basically, in its simplest form, is that if you have a window that's broken (and) you don't repair it, then it signals to criminals that you don't care about the property. And what you're doing is inviting crime.... People communicate by how they care for their property. [The condition of the property conveys] how much respect they have, how much respect they have for their community.³⁸

This former captain at the LAPD Pacific Division stressed the importance of maintaining strict enforcement utilizing this approach. One example of the type of operation applied in Oakwood was the enforcement of vehicle codes:

When you have an area that is that small geographically, and most of your crooks are the same players and you have the people that are familiar with those people, it makes it a heck of a lot easier when you're policing that area. And, you know, we just kept the suspects alert at all times because if there was a reason to stop 'em with the high priority enforcement, we were going to do it. We towed all those cars out of there, either with expired tags, or (that) had been parked in vacant lots or whatever--just trying to clean up the place. And we towed in a month and a half's time, something like two-hundred and thirty-one vehicles out of there. I referred to it as the Great American Tow-off because...you just see one tow truck after another going by and picking up cars and towing them out.³⁹

The high-suppression crackdown on drug and gang activity along with the strict enforcement of civil violations had one major problem. It did not make finer distinctions between constituent groups within the neighborhood just as the characterization of the African American population in the Oakwood Plan did not make important distinctions between various viewpoints and positions within it. Operations such as the "Great American Tow-off" angered many who were not themselves involved in criminal gang activity and who were in the most economically strained position to retrieve their vehicles and get them up to code. This is not to say that codes should not be enforced, but that targeting communities in this way to tackle more major problems often produces greater resentment and anxiety. The approach of "tough love" which was heavy on the tough and sparse on love led to greater social antagonisms between police and many community residents and between those who were seen as siding with one or the other.

Part of the LAPD's controversial past has to do with its institutional culture which is replicated in the training of officers and the directions that the line officers

receive from those in command. The LAPD has historically had an aggressive use of force policy. One LAPD officer who was assigned to a patrol in Oakwood described the stance they were trained to take towards suspects:

It don't matter whether you're Black or White, it's a mentality that these guys have that you gotta be the aggressor, that you gotta be strong, that you gotta destroy the enemy. Because they teach you in the academy to stop their action. But then the anger gets all riled up. All that stuff that we talked about at roll call, all the stuff you've seen on TV, all the stuff you've read in the papers, every nasty ugly call you've gone to, builds up. And this one person, and I tell you, when somebody tries to attack me, we are trained to destroy them. You let them know that they don't do that anymore.⁴⁰

Educational sessions were conducted at roll call to keep officers abreast on shooting policies, even after graduating from the police academy. The purpose of these sessions is to keep officers updated on policy as well as to maintain their morale. But the impact of the implicit and explicit messages in many of these briefings may serve to "harden" officers:

Every month they gotta do a [refresher on] shooting policy. They'll show a film of some officer getting shot, or somebody else getting shot. And so every time you see that, to me, it leaves an impact, (pause) a scar. ... They'll show a film of an officer getting shot or a white boy's life, trying to inspire you to keep fighting. But it reinforces the reality of "you can get shot." Or "you might have to pull your gun out today and kill somebody." Neither side is easy.

I was in a shooting back in (the 1980s) and to see another person's life gone like that. People think, 'yeah, just take 'em out and shoot 'em,' but is a lot more to it than just pullin that... I mean, yeah, you can pull a gun out, and a lot of guys shoot people and they become numb to it. These same individuals are dangerous individuals because they have lost compassion, for people. They really went into a Vietnam mode, I call it. Their sensors are singed to compassion. This is a human being. This isn't a deer. You didn't catch a wild boar. A human being. A lot of them have forgotten that.⁴¹

Internal differences within the LAPD created deep divisions which were exacerbated in the midst of the controversy over the beating of Rodney King and the replacement of LAPD Chief Daryl Gates by Willie Williams, the first African American to hold the position of Chief Commanding Officer. LAPD officers are not a

homogeneous group. Ideological, religious, political, racial, ethical and moral beliefs and attitudes differ widely among the ranks. Community residents often make distinctions among law enforcement officers based on direct contact with them or hearing from another's experience. Some officers are perceived as fair, sincere or respectful while others are perceived as racist, disrespectful or abusive. Those perceived as using excessive force are sometimes targeted for citizen complaints.

Racist attitudes and racially biased practices within the LAPD have been documented in numerous sources, including the aforementioned Christopher Commission Report initiated by the Los Angeles City Council and later in the testimony of Mark Furhman given during the trial of O.J. Simpson in 1995. Oakwood was not immune to these problems, as the same officer who once patrolled Oakwood explained:

And so you got a lot of racist guys on the job. That's just there. That's another reason there's so much trouble in our department, too. In the streets, you got some guy that comes from Iowa, they come from different places where they have no contact with Blacks or Hispanics, and therefore they believe the hype. They believe that all Orientals know karate. They think that all Blacks are violent. That all of them are criminals.⁴²

He witnessed actions on the part of other police officers whom he believed used unnecessary force in the apprehension of individuals in Oakwood:

Now in Oakwood, I've been down there, and they've used a lot of unnecessary force. There's been guys down there that took dirty underwear off the ground and stuck it the guy's mouth. One guy had a gun stuck in his mouth -- the barrel in his mouth. These were complaints being made. I've seen guys kicked in the groin. ... I've seen tons of guys dragged across the street, handcuffed. This is why they don't forget. I didn't forget it. They go, "oh, here we go again, more abuse by the police department." So, people go "why are people so mad?" Well, if your son got beaten up unjustly, and even if he was guilty, the policy says 'use the amount of force necessary to activate an arrest.'⁴³

Anger, animosity and distrust inevitably arise when incidents of police abuse of power take place repeatedly within a community. Residents within a neighborhood become aware of which officers violate rules of law and use-of-force policies. When officers are shot at, they are oftentimes those who are targeted for the use of excessive force or who are known to mistreat suspects. Some have received death threats from anonymous individuals. An LAPD officer recalled one such instance:

There have been officers that were taken out of the division because of the death threats on their lives. Like I said, none of it's warranted. But this one guy was down there -- it was put in the paper so I could mention his name is Womack. A year or two ago, they had this paper out called, in the LA Times, they had the top 40 officers in the city that were "excessive force" guys.⁴⁴ Well, he was one of them. And this guy would kick in doors at apartment buildings, totally violating rights. No regard for [search] warrants. Just come in there, kick in the doors, drag you out of there, take them to jail, I mean, just totally defying the law -- making up their own law. ... So that's why we got the guys on the street that are totally resistant to anything the police do or try to do, any programs they try to do, because they don't trust them.⁴⁵

Racialization of criminality and the salience of racial group boundaries

The racially specific characteristics of gang membership coupled with the racially coded definitions of gangs used by law enforcement resulted in policies and practices which had differential impacts on racial groups. Race-specific policies, in turn, increased the salience of racial group boundaries. The increased salience of racial group boundaries not only affected the trajectory of gang conflict, but deepened racial divisions along which residents found themselves divided. Along with other sources of racial tension, the exacerbation of faultlines by policies and practices seen as racially discriminatory added to the volatility of the conflict.

There is often a self-reinforcing relationship between the perception of racial differences, the creation of policies adapted to them, and the creation of racial differences (Mann 1995). For example, the demographic concentration of low-income African American communities in areas perceived as having higher crime rates, the one-dimensional images of Black gang members, and the specific characteristics of Black gangs have resulted in the over-identification of young Black men as gang members (Reiner 1992).⁴⁶ This over-identification naturally increases the rate of arrest for targeted population groups and may partially explain the outrageously high rate of arrest among African American male youth in California, among whom nearly two-thirds have been arrested by age 30 (statistic from Calif. Dept. of Justice, cited in Reiner 1992:125). The arrest statistics, in turn, reinforce the impulse to think that young African American males who live in certain neighborhoods are involved in illegal gang activity.

The disproportionate impact on inner-city African Americans, Latinos, and other racial minority groups as a result of the “war on drugs” and the “war on gangs” increased the salience of racial group boundaries. Not only did individuals entangled in the criminal justice system feel that this was unjust, but so did many who witnessed this disparity. Among those policies commonly cited as racially biased is the sentencing of criminals convicted for selling crack versus cocaine. Crack and cocaine are made of the same substance but are sold in different form. African American dealers sell crack in higher proportion than cocaine, which is more often sold by white dealers. Under federal sentencing guidelines, judges are directed to multiply quantities of crack by 100 to determine the length of prison sentences, giving much harsher sentences to crack offenders than to cocaine offenders. Tonry (1995: 41) refers to one federal court of appeals as reporting that 95 percent of federal crack defendants are African American. A recognition of the discriminatory character of these policies as well as the witnessing of the criminalization of large cohorts of young African American and Latino men within each of the respective communities contributed to resentments and feelings of injustice.

The incarceration of a rising number of young men in California intensified another problem. Racial division became especially acute in the LA County jails and the California prison system, both sites of the most physically violent and organizationally-tied inter-minority group conflict within a publicly-run institution. During the 1980s, the racial balance of the county jail and state prison population shifted and saw an increase in the proportion of Latinos, partly due to the increase in their state population. By 1991, Latino jail inmates outnumbered African American inmates 40 percent to 37 percent (Meyer 1994). As the ranks of the inmate population swelled, so did the ranks of prison gangs which, in California at least, were racially organized. The Mexican Mafia, Black Guerrilla Family, the Aryan Brotherhood and the Consolidated Crips were the major prison gangs organized within the southern California penal system. Fights in the prison system became endemic in the late 1980s and 1990s. Prison battles worked their way onto the street and vice versa. Race riots ended in the deaths of inmates, while gangs held significant control over the territorial use of space within the prisons. Major race riots between African American and Latino inmates reached crisis proportions in November 1994 when an estimated 1,000 inmates at the alleged instigation of the Mexican Mafia became entangled in a racial brawl that left eighty inmates injured at Pitchess Honor Rancho correctional facility (Meyer 1994). As prison authorities began

segregating inmates by racial group to avoid fights, inclusive boundaries were reinforced and cross-racial interaction evermore stunted (Tamaki 1996).

Changing relations between residents and government agencies

The dramatic shift in social policy during the Reagan-Bush era from an emphasis on social programs such as education and social welfare to that of law enforcement and crime suppression activities has transformed the interface between government institutions and neighborhoods. Between 1980 and 1990, the federal government reduced its contribution to education by half. For the first time in US history beginning in the 1980s, more public expenditures were spent for criminal justice than for education by state, county and municipal governments combined (Chambliss 1995).

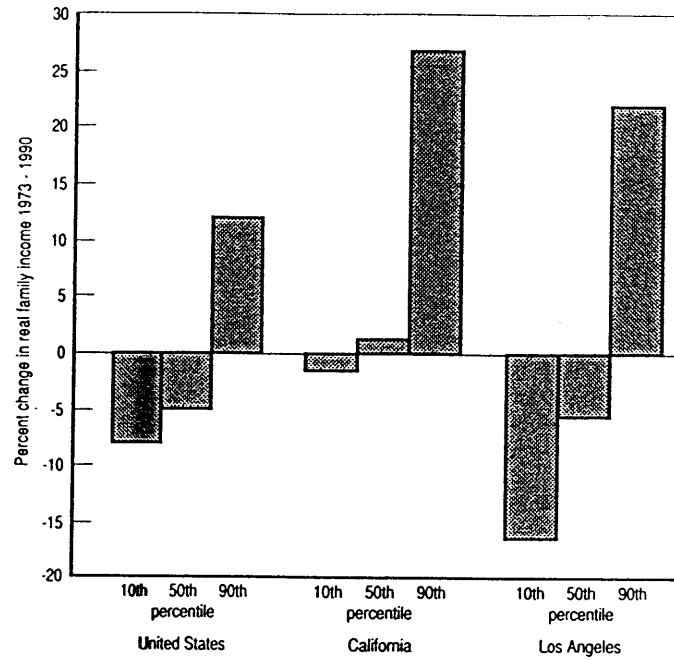
Shrinking funds for social programs resulted in the cutback or closing of social agencies in low-income communities. Mental health, childcare, tutoring, counseling, referral, youth development, elderly assistance, and other programs faced difficult challenges. Many completely closed while others reduced staffing. The more successful programs have been those with professional personnel and trained leadership. Oftentimes, however, programs with strong technical expertise and professionalism did not hire the type of personnel who can maintain strong bonds with those populations most distressed and "at-risk." The combination of funding cutbacks and a trend toward professionalism have weakened institutional ties in low-income and minority communities. Schools are the last major governmental institution with which youth have regular contact. But with a high school dropout rate in the Los Angeles Unified School District of over fifty percent, law enforcement has become the main interface with government institutions for many youth and families.

In Los Angeles, a shift in the interface between the state and society is evident in the pattern of county government funding. Following the passage of California State Proposition 13 in 1978 which reduced property taxes for many homeowners, Los Angeles county became heavily dependent on state aid (from 45 percent of county general revenues in 1977 to 54 percent in 1990). State grants and mandates focused largely on spending in health and corrections. The increased reliance on state funds combined with the rapid growth in allocations for "public safety" prompted the shift in interface towards law enforcement at the local level (Niblack and Stan 1992).

Competition over a shrinking pool of resources tended to pit one racial or ethnic group against another, generating racial antagonisms within some sectors of the

Figure 5.5

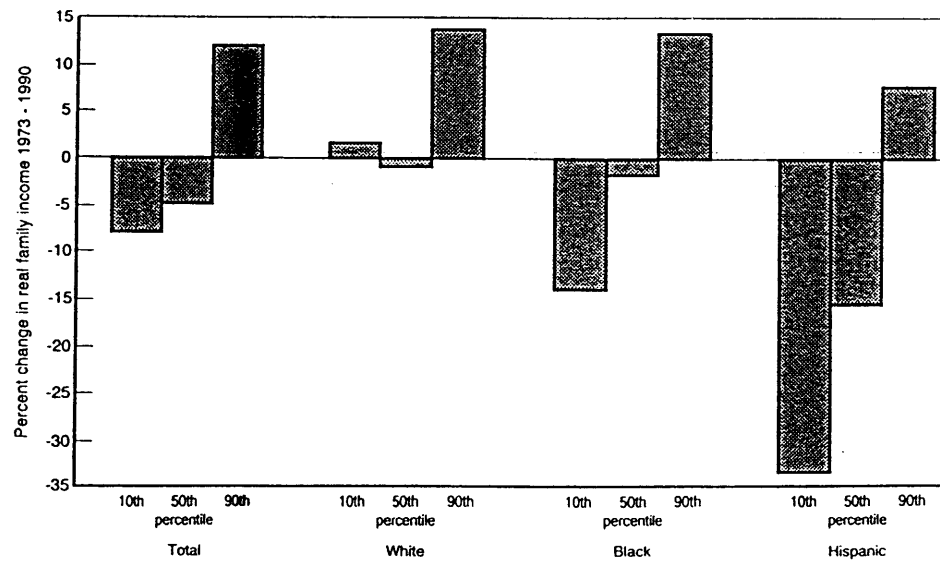
**Trends in real family income, 1973-1990
US, California and Los Angeles**



SOURCE: Karoly's (1992) tabulations from the March CPS from 1973 to 1990.

Figure 5.6

Trends in real family income, 1973-1990, by race and ethnicity



SOURCE: Karoly's (1992) tabulations from the March CPS from 1973 to 1990.

population (Oliver and Johnson 1984).⁴⁷ Coupled with the divisive tenor of racial politics in the region, nativist opposition to the inflow of new immigrants, the proliferation of race-based organizations, and the patterns of racial segregation, public battles over shrinking resources often took the form of racial competition as opposed to class unrest. The substance of racial discourse surrounding these battles contributed to deepening racial and ethnic cleavages.

This period of retrenchment in social programs and expansion of law enforcement powers coincided with economic decline and the proliferation of drugs and firearms across the country. These trends had particularly adverse effects on children. The decline in real wages, increase in long-term unemployment, and cutbacks in income maintenance programs contributed to a growing pool of those persistently poor. In 1990, fifteen percent of all families in the US with children under age 18 were poor and one in five children lived under the poverty line (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990). Drugs followed economic decline, offering mental escape to some and income opportunities to others. Families struggled for stability as government programs were cut. For some youth, gang membership or affiliation offered an alternative source for social support, recreation, physical protection, and sometimes economic stability that the economy and other sources could no longer match.

Los Angeles experienced a greater widening of the income and wage gap as compared to the rest of the state and to the nation. As figure 5.5 shows, the family income of the highest earning 10th percentile rose while the family income lowest earning 10th percentile dropped in Los Angeles as well as in California and the rest of the nation (Karoly 1992). The widening gap, however, was most striking in Los Angeles where the income of families in the bottom decile declined 17 percent while

Table 5.1
Percentage of Families with Children Under Age 18 That
Were Poor, by Family Type and Race and Ethnicity, Los Angeles
County 1990

	All	Married Couple (%)	Male Householder (%)	Female Householder (%)
White	12	8	16	28
African American	26	9	25	41
Asian/Pacific Islander	13	11	19	30
Hispanic	24	17	27	46
Total	17	11	22	37

SOURCE: Census of Population, STF-3A (P123, P124A, P124B, P125), 1990. (DaVanzo 1992)

rates of economic poverty ranging from 28 and 30 percent among White and those of the top decile increased 22 percent between 1973 and 1990. The polarization between rich and poor is even more evident among non-white groups as seen in figure 5.6 (Karoly 1992). Since incomes grew more rapidly for higher paying occupations and given the unequal distribution of groups on the socioeconomic ladder, Asian Americans, African Americans and Latinos experienced greater income polarization among their racial cohorts. The poverty rates among African Americans (26 percent) and Latinos (24 percent) in Los Angeles County were well above the county-wide rate of 17 percent as shown in table 5.1. Female-headed households suffered the highest rates of poverty with figures of 41 and 46 percent among African Americans and Latinos respectively (DaVanzo 1992).

As social programs retreated from servicing the most distressed neighborhoods in a period of economic decline and as more and more youth dropped out of school, a disturbing number of youth living in neighborhoods with high rates of economic poverty became entangled in the criminal justice system. Family contact with “the system” became heavily weighted towards law enforcement institutions. The nature of this contact was much less amicable than that which families would have with teachers or social workers and, in many cases, antagonistic relationships were formed between law enforcement agencies and residents who lived in heavily policed neighborhoods.

Tonry (1995) illustrates how the war on gangs and the war on drugs had a particularly severe impact on Black and Latino communities during the eighties and nineties. A disproportionately high percentage of minority youth became trapped in the cycle of crime and caught in the web of law enforcement. Nationally, the incarceration rates for African Americans are nearly seven times higher than those for whites. This has been attributed to various factors, including the varying patterns of criminality among racial groups, intensified policing in minority communities, and biases in arrests and sentencing.⁴⁸ Between 1979 and 1992, the proportion of African Americans among those admitted to state and federal prisons increased from 39 to 54 percent (Tonry 1995). In California during the late eighties, approximately 33 percent of all African American men between ages 20 to 29 were either in jail, in prison, or on parole or probation (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice 1990). By the early 1990s, the extent to which Black and Latino communities interfaced with law enforcement personnel was astoundingly high. In 1991, nearly half (395,245 out of 824,133) of those incarcerated under the jurisdiction of state and federal correctional authorities were

African American while African Americans represented less than 13 percent of the total US population (US Department of Justice 1992a). The 1995 report of the Sentencing Project estimates that in 1994, almost one of every three (30.2 percent) Black males 20-29 years of age were in prison or jail or on probation or parole on any given day. This proportion had increased from almost one in four (23%) in 1990. They estimate that the proportion of Hispanic inmates in state and federal prisons has doubled since 1980 (The Sentencing Project 1995).⁴⁹

Table 5.2

California Juveniles in Custody by Ethnicity and Gender,
Secure Public Facilities, 1989

<i>Ethnicity</i>	State Population		Juveniles in Custody		Rate	Index Score
	N	%	N	%		
Anglo American	1,405,369	46.6	3,701	26.8	263	0.58
Male	719,840	23.8	3,231	23.5	449	0.99
Female	685,529	22.8	470	3.4	69	0.15
African American	261,118	8.7	5,093	37.0	1,950	4.25
Male	130,922	4.5	4,739	34.4	3,620	7.64
Female	130,196	4.5	354	2.6	272	0.58
Latino	1,036,403	34.4	4,458	32.4	430	0.94
Male	525,677	17.4	4,188	30.4	797	1.75
Female	510,726	17.0	270	2.0	53	0.12
Asian American/other	309,985	10.3	515	3.7	166	0.36
Male	158,022	5.2	466	3.4	295	0.65
Female	151,963	5.0	49	0.4	32	0.08
Total	3,012,875	100.0	13,767	100.0	457	N/A
Male	1,534,461	50.9	12,624	91.7	823	1.80
Female	1,478,414	49.1	1,143	8.3	77	0.17

SOURCE: California Department of Finance population estimates, 1989, ages 10-17.

SOURCE: 1989 Children in Custody census of public juvenile detention, correctional, and shelter facilities.

Rates per 100,000 juveniles were computed by dividing the number in custody by the number of youth population for each gender and racial/ethnic group, and multiplying by 100,000.

Index score is percentage in custody divided by percentage of state population.

(Austin 1995:162)

Incarceration rates among youth in California have been exceptionally high. Austin (1995) reported the youth incarceration rate in 1989 as 463 per 100,000 juveniles

in the state,⁵⁰ a ratio more than double the national average of 207 per 100,000 juveniles. Not only are rates much higher, the proportion of minority youth have drastically increased in recent years. Table 5.2 shows the differential rates of juvenile custody by ethnicity and gender in “secure” California public facilities in 1989 in comparison to their population in the state. Among youth of color, African American males are most highly “overrepresented.” Young African American men comprised a higher proportion among those in custody compared to their total population in the state (34.4 percent compared to 4.5 percent). Representation of young Latino men in custody was similar to their proportion of the state population (30.4 percent compared to 17.4 percent). Anglo and Asian American young men were in custody in proportions lower than their percentage of the state population (23.5 and 3.4 percent compared to 23.8 and 5.2 percent respectively). It is important to add that African American, Latino and Asian American rates of youth custody were quickly rising during the late 1980s, with Asian American custody rising at the fastest rate.⁵¹

Table 5.3
State Prisoners Incarcerated For Drug Offenses
By Race / Ethnic Origin And Sex
1986 and 1991

	1986		1991		% INCREASE	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
White non-Hispanic	12,868	969	26,452	3,300	106%	241%
Black non-Hispanic	13,974	667	73,932	6,193	429%	828%
Hispanic	8,484	664	35,965	2,843	324%	328%
Other	604	70	1,323	297	119%	324%
Total	35,930	2,370	137,672	12,633	283%	433%

Source: Mauer, Marc and Tracy Huling, *Young Black Americans and the Criminal Justice System: Five Years Later*, WDC: The Sentencing Project, 1995.

Much of the increase in the prison population nationally was a result of the war on drugs. Torny (1995) argues that “by trying to reduce the supply of drugs rather than the demand for them, by adopting a prohibitionist crime control approach, rather than a

harm-reduction approach, policy makers chose strategies that had little prospect of succeeding but a high likelihood of worsening racial disproportion in the criminal justice system.” The number of incarcerated drug offenders rose 510 percent from 1983 to 1993 (The Sentencing Project 1995). The proportion of African Americans arrested for drug offenses increased from 24 percent in 1980 to 39 percent in 1993. This rate is much higher than their reported rate of drug use, which is comparable and lower for some substances when compared to other racial groups.⁵² A 1990 national household survey by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) indicates that African Americans comprise 13 percent of monthly drug users, but comprise 34.7 percent of arrests for drug possession (National Institute on Drug Abuse 1991). African Americans along with Hispanics comprise 80 percent of offenders sentenced to state prison for drug offenses. Table 5.3 illustrates the rapid rate of increase in incarceration for drug offenses and the disproportionate increase for African Americans, Hispanics and women (The Sentencing Project 1995).

For those who may not be under the direct jurisdiction of the criminal justice system, many have been entered into a vast nationwide database which tracks suspected gang members. The Los Angeles District Attorney's Office expressed concern over the high proportion of African American males in Los Angeles who have been identified as gang members. Nearly one half (47 percent) of all African American males between the ages of 21 and 24 are entered in the national gang database called GREAT. They admit that “that number is so far out of line with other ethnic groups that a careful, professional examination is needed to determine whether police procedures may be systematically over-identifying Black youths as gang members” (Reiner 1992: v). In contrast, 0.5 percent of Anglo youths, 6 to 7 percent of Asian youths, and 9 to 10 percent of Latino youths are documented as participating in gangs.

Law enforcement institutions and limits of democracy

One difference between social service programs and law enforcement agencies is the level of democratic participation which is fostered in the development of plans and policies. Law enforcement institutions function much less democratically than other institutions in US society. This problem is historically rooted in the history of law enforcement institutions. Traditionally, urban police departments have been based on paramilitary models of organization. Authority is vested in the higher echelons with little room for democratic debate or outside input into their internal policies and

practices. One of the problems resulting from this structure of organization is that law-abiding citizens are often cast as potential enemies (Bordua and Reiss 1966, Guyot 1979). An adversarial atmosphere is present before a crime is committed.

While many police departments are implementing the approach of community-oriented policing, this is in tension with the traditional operations of law enforcement agencies. One of the main techniques of power in crime suppression is the use of surprise and undercover operations. Covert actions, by definition, cannot be guided by resident or community input. For all of these reasons combined, police and other law enforcement agencies tend to have little meaningful interaction which nurtures greater mutual understanding with the constituencies with whom they serve.

This creates serious problems in a world of multiple publics. First, law enforcement agencies are not able to gain a full understanding of the various views, perspectives and concerns of various constituencies. Second, policies are set with little input from respective publics and, therefore, may not result in the outcomes intended. And third, the lack of input and the "blind" implementation of policy often results in greater alienation between those agencies and adversely affected publics as well as between social groups within a community. In low-income neighborhoods where the main interface between the state and civil society lies in the area of law enforcement, a more serious form of alienation occurs--one in which there is tension and animosity between highly policed communities and government institutions more generally. This leads to a greater feeling of marginalization within society at large. This can lead to anger, resentment, and hatred and social polarization.

In Oakwood, the shift in the interface between local institutions and local residents which gave law enforcement institutions much greater dominance resulted in greater alienation between residents and public institutions as well as among multiple publics. The dominant presence of law enforcement agencies in the lives of those most marginalized from other mainstream institutions led to a sense of siege in neighborhoods targeted for crime suppression activities by police and federal agents. The use of high suppression activities created a resentment among those who perceived those actions as biased against their particular racial or ethnic group. This concurrently stirred resentments against other groups. This problem was especially evident as they attempted to deal with events surrounding the gang war which I describe next.

¹ The voluminous literature on institutionalism has discussed many "institutional" factors which affect the making and implementation of policy. These factors include such variables as organizational

structures, protocols, decision-making systems, structures of rewards and punishments, decision points, political pressures, and institutional culture. Policy environments include institutional culture, but can be distinguished as more popularly held beliefs which shape the behavior of institutional actors.

² Law enforcement agencies probably enjoy the widest range of discretionary powers of any other type of government agency. Michael Lipsky's description of the level of discretion employed by social workers as "street level bureaucrats" gives us a hint as to the range of discretion that, say, police officers may possess (Lipsky 1980). Given the fact that lines of accountability and processes for public scrutiny are heavily internalized within these agencies, cases of misconduct often go uncorrected. Only in unique circumstances do cases of police misconduct become a *cause celebre* and some reforms are forced upon the institution, as in the cases of Eula Love and Rodney King in Los Angeles.

³ Hall and his colleagues argue that a moral panic was sparked in Britain with a mugging incident in a relatively quiet town. While much ado was made over this one incident in the early seventies, it was discussed in public forums as representative of a breakdown in the traditional norms and values of England. The incident was thematically framed within the context of the growing urban crisis, rising crime, the breakdown of law and order, the liberal conspiracy, the white backlash and racial violence, embellished by the mass media, politicians, and political pundits. Muggings became known as a Black crime and associated with problems of immigration and the welfare state.

⁴ Moral panics are a social phenomenon first coined by Stan Cohen and appropriately applied by Stuart Hall to explain the change in attitudes and political mood which swept British society in the 1960s. Hall and his colleagues argue that a moral panic was sparked in Britain by a mugging incident in a relatively quiet town. While much ado was made over this one incident in the early seventies, it was discussed in public forums as representative of a breakdown in the traditional norms and values of England. The incident was thematically framed within the context of the growing urban crisis, rising crime, the breakdown of law and order, the liberal conspiracy, the white backlash and racial violence, and embellished by the mass media, politicians, and political pundits. Muggings became known as a Black crime and associated with problems of immigration and the welfare state.

⁵ These included *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) which granted the right to remain silent outside of the presence of an attorney and *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963) which granted the right to legal counsel.

⁶ Federal and state expenditures increased between 1972 and 1988 from approximately \$1.5 million to over \$7 million and from approximately \$3 million to \$21.5 million respectively. This increase is not adjusted for inflation. (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1984, 1988, 1992a *Depressing Boon Among If Look*)

⁷ Violent crimes are offenses of murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault. This category does not include property crimes which are larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, burglary and arson.

⁸ Prepared statement of Daniel M. Hartnett. In *Hearing before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundred Second Congress, June 26, 1992, Serial No. 78*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, page 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, page 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 6.

¹¹ See Stone (1988) regarding the powerful use of symbols in defining social problems.

¹² California Council on Criminal Justice. (1989). *State Task Force on Gangs and Drugs*, Sacramento, CA: The Task Force, page 12.

¹³ Prepared statement of Daniel M. Hartnett, Associate Director, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. In U.S. House of Representatives, *Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms' Proposal for a Gang Information Network*. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee of the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One-hundred second Congress, June 26, 1992, page 5. WDC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁴ Interview with Michael Genelin, Office of the LA District Attorney, 1 June 1995, Los Angeles, CA.

¹⁵ Los Angeles Police Department (1994). "Pacific Community Police Station, Oakwood Community Safety Plan, 1994 Update." Manuscript.

¹⁶ Los Angeles Police Department. (n.d.). "Violence, Money and Street Gangs." Manuscript issued by the Detective Support Division, Gang Information Section.

¹⁷ Los Angeles Police Department. (n.d.) *The LAPD Gang Awareness School Training Material*. Prepared by Gang Information Section, Detective Support Division, page 74.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, page 9 (emphasis theirs).

¹⁹ Ibid., page 34.

²⁰ Interview with LAPD Detective K.R., 21 November 1994, Los Angeles.

²¹ Gates, Daryl F. and Robert K. Jackson. (1990). "Gang Violence in L.A." *The Police Chief*. November, pp. 20.

²² Hagedorn (1988) and Huff (1989, 1990) note that oftentimes, cities tend to move from denial to overreaction, both equally dangerous approaches towards crime and its prevention.

²³ Thomas (1992) argues that within the cycle of policy shifts, "delinquents" are defined as a subgroup within some larger problem group (e.g., paupers, neglected children). Ideas that "sell" in reform movements focus on the behaviors of the larger problem group and attempt to change their behavior, avoiding economic or structural issues which may harm the rich and powerful. Reformers make unfair comparisons to past practices with an optimistic assessment of the new reform promising to "solve" the problem of delinquency.

²⁴ Some of the components of high suppression stem from federal legislation such as the RICO law and the 1993 Crime Bill. The RICO statutes increase enforcement of interstate trafficking of illegal drugs and stolen goods. The RICO statutes have been used to prosecute gangs as criminal organizations and convict them on felony counts which require incarceration in federal prison for longer sentencing periods. The Crime Bill expands the death penalty to 52 additional offenses and includes the controversial three strikes provision which provides mandatory sentences of 25 years to life for the third felony. There are also several provisions aimed specifically at gang-related crime. One provision makes gang membership in certain types of gangs a criminal offense. Street crimes involving firearms would also be considered a federal offense.

²⁵ Smith (1979) found that the juvenile justice system in the US had 25 system functions (e.g., police station intake), 121 alternative decision choices (e.g., counsel and release), and 22 termination processes. A system chart of the LA county probation office alone revealed a total of 138 decision points. Stapleton and Needle (1982) noted that variation in flow of clients into and through different decision points are related to officers' contrasting philosophical perspectives on justice (criminal responsibility vs. individual liberties).

²⁶ Klein (1993) reviews the research on deterrence and concludes that conflicting results have been the hallmark of research. Several studies went against the deterrent hypothesis and a larger group of studies yielded no support for or no disproof of hypotheses, while another group claimed clear evidence in support of deterrence propositions.

²⁷ It is important to note that there was a change in leadership in the LAPD which meant a gradual shift in approach during the period of the gang war. This change took place at the level of Chief of the entire LAPD and change in the commanding officer at the Pacific Division. However, the dominant approach through most of its duration was shaped by the Oakwood Plan. The LAPD is organized under various geographic divisions, such as the South Bureau, Wilshire Division, Hollywood, Downtown, Hollenbeck, and the Pacific Division. Each division has its own commanding officer, detectives, supporting officers, patrol supervisors and beat patrol. Many have specialized units within the division which focus on narcotics, vice, or gang-related crime. In the Pacific Division, which patrols the west Los Angeles area that includes Venice, there has been a special task force called the Oakwood Task force within the division. Under the command of Captain Jan Carlson, the Pacific Division developed the Oakwood Plan which was written and implemented in 1989. This provided a blueprint for LAPD policing practices in Oakwood for several years preceding the outbreak of the gang war in 1993. Towards the beginning period of the war, Captain Carlson left the force and was replaced by Captain Richard Legarra who worked to modify the approach taken in Oakwood towards greater community-oriented. The new captain instituted an "Oakwood Safety Plan." This adjustment in approach took place over the duration of the war and was not fully implemented until near the war's end. For some of the senior patrol officers in the Oakwood Task Force, there was little change in policing practices between the Carlson and Legarra periods. For other officers, it meant a shift in their approach toward greater community involvement with local residents.

²⁸ Interview with former Pacific Division Captain Janice L. Carlson, 16 June 1995, Los Angeles.

²⁹ The 1993 update was written under the leadership of then-Captain Richard Legarra who had been assigned commanding officer of the Pacific division earlier that year.

³⁰ Interview with LAPD Detective K.R., 21 November 1994, Los Angeles, California.

³¹ Ibid.

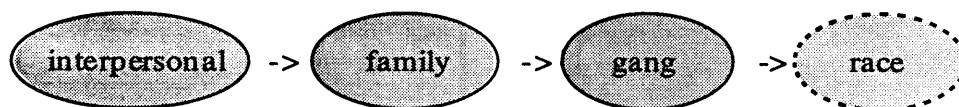
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- ³² Los Angeles Police Department. (n.d.). *The Oakwood Plan*. Manuscript.
- ³³ Interview with anonymous, 1 June 1995, Los Angeles, California.
- ³⁴ Christopher Commission, *Report of the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department*, page xix.
- ³⁵ Ibid., page 34.
- ³⁶ Ibid., page 69.
- ³⁷ Mitchell, John L., "Officer-involved shootings at 10-year high," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 January 1993, B1 & B4.
- ³⁸ Interview with Janice L. Carlson, 13 June 1995, Los Angeles, California.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with anonymous, 13 August 1994, Los Angeles, California.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Richard A. Serrano, "'They Hit Me, So I Hit Back'; The Christopher Commission spoke of 44 'problem officers' in the LAPD." *Los Angeles Times*, 4 October 1992, A-1.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Reiner also states that the "fashion preference for gang-inspired clothing, music and paraphernalia" along with "peer pressure on marginal youths to 'claim the hood'" and the willingness of some Black youth to claim multiple sets have led to an overcount and duplicate counting of African Americans identified as members of gangs.
- ⁴⁷ For example, many educational and social service agencies which faced funding cuts were forced to downsize their staff. Due to the need for bilingual translators, however, many of those who had bilingual skills were spared layoffs. Immigrants who had bilingual skills had the competitive edge given the linguistic diversity of the city.
- ⁴⁸ There is no consensus on the degree to which racial or ethnic bias explains the disproportionate representation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system. Bridges, DeBurle and Dutton (1991) reviewed 37 studies of racial difference in the juvenile courts and found that 14 studies observed no significant difference in the processing of youths by racial or ethnic group categories while 23 studies reported significant differences. Separate studies by Blumstein (1982, 1993) and Langan (1985) conclude that much of the disproportionate rates of incarceration of African Americans can be explained by differential arrest patterns. Blumstein concludes that eighty percent of African American "overrepresentation" in prison can be explained by the differential arrest rates between racial groups. However, differential arrest rates do not fully explain the disproportionate incarceration rates. The aggregation of data hides more specific explanations. For example, it does not allow for the examination of sentencing differentials for Black-on-White, White-on-White, White-on-Black or Black-on-Black crimes (Torny 1995). In addition, Blumstein concludes that only half of the racial disproportionality in incarceration rates for drug offenses are not explained by higher arrest rates. (The Sentencing Project 1995)
- ⁴⁹ The Sentencing Project report warns that the data for Hispanics are "somewhat unreliable and should be interpreted with caution" due to the absence of data on ethnicity for California and Texas.
- ⁵⁰ Rate based on a 1-day count of juveniles held in California public facilities for delinquency offenses. Source: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1991).
- ⁵¹ Austin (1995) compiled data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1989) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1991) to show that between 1985 to 1989, the number of children ages 10 to 17 in custody in California public juvenile facilities increased among African Americans (47.9 percent increase), Latinos (38.3 percent increase), and Asian Americans (192.7 percent increase) while the number decreased among Anglo Americans (9.9 percent decline) and American Indians (12.6 percent decline).
- ⁵² The 1990 National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) national household survey on drug abuse showed that self-reported drug use among Blacks and Whites respectively were 10 percent and 11.7 percent who ever used cocaine, 1.7 and .7 percent who ever used heroin, 31.7 and 34.2 who ever used marijuana, 3.0 and 9.7 percent who ever used hallucinogens and 76.6 and 85.2 percent who ever consumed alcohol. (National Institute on Drug Abuse 1991)

CHAPTER 6

THE GANG WAR AND THE ESCALATION OF RACIAL TENSIONS

The deadly war began between the predominately Latino gang called the Culver City Boys and the predominately African American gang called the Shoreline Crips in the Mar Vista Gardens. It soon spread to the nearby Oakwood neighborhood of Venice where another Latino gang called the V-13 came into conflict with members of the Shoreline Crips who resided in both Mar Vista and Venice. The conflict began as a series of personal conflicts in Oakwood and a conflict over turf in Mar Vista. While events in Mar Vista will be mentioned, the main focus of this chapter is the escalation of gang conflict and the generation of racial tensions in the Oakwood neighborhood.

Over the ten-month period from late summer 1993 to the truce reached in June 1994, the violence became increasingly racialized, blurring the issues of conflict and shifting the salience of group boundaries from that of individual and family to that of gang loyalty and racial group identification. Thus, the trajectory of escalation can be charted along the following group boundaries:



Each successive stage of the conflict as illustrated above represents a shift in the relative salience of various identity group boundaries, with the most salient boundary listed in the diagram as a defining characteristic for naming purposes only. While other relevant identities also defined the formation of publics, these will be discussed further in this chapter. The point here is that as the character and characterization of the conflict evolved over time, multiple publics emerged and shifted in composition and alignment. In this case, the more the character and characterization of the conflict (from within and without) transformed from an interpersonal one to one that was perceived as heavily racial in nature, the larger the and more racially defined the publics grew. In other words, as race became an increasingly prominent identifier in the pattern of victimization

in the gang war (even over that of gang membership) and as events were interpreted in racially-charged terms, racial group boundaries became that much more salient in the gang war as well as in social interactions throughout the community at large. Racial divisions were not all pervasive, however. For some segments of the neighborhood, the racialization of the gang war created deep antagonisms and racial divisions, while others tried desperately to quell racial discord and reframe the conflict, that is, “deracialize” it and define it more strictly as a gang battle. This chapter chronicles this process applying the concept of multiple publics.

At each stage of escalation, events took place that were then interpreted by individuals and publics affected. Discussion and debate over the meaning of events often ensued. This interpretive discourse included portraits of the self and others, causal explanations of events and related actions, motives of groups and individuals and moral judgments regarding others’ actions. The interpretation of events was also influenced by the media which reached a broader audience than the immediate events themselves. Based on the conclusions drawn by individuals, the salience of their individual identities were either reinforced, reshuffled in relation to one another, or reconstituted; publics based on the salience of those identity group boundaries remained or changed in size and composition. Multiple publics responded in turn to each event as it was interpreted. Each response would be read by other publics as the iterative process continued. Oftentimes, the actions of one public would not be read by another in the manner they were intended. Particularly in situations where intentions and meanings are not verified or verifiable, which is often the case in conflict settings, interaction between publics is fraught with misunderstanding which adds to existing sources of conflict.

The war originated somewhat differently in Oakwood as compared to Mar Vista Gardens. In Mar Vista Gardens, the lines of division remained for the most part along gang boundaries, while in the Oakwood neighborhood of Venice, it is easier to see an evolution of the conflict from a set of interpersonal altercations to one eventually defined primarily along gang and racial boundaries. In the following sections, I begin with the origins of the war and present the interpretations of events among multiple publics at various stages of the conflict centered in Venice. This helps to explain the interaction between the parties involved and the racial distancing within the neighborhood that resulted.

Precipitating events

A Backdrop of Shifting Gang Alliances

Several events precipitated the tragic and deadly gang war. But the backdrop against which these precipitating events took place were paradoxically positive. In the early 1990s, gang truces had been negotiated across the city among the predominately African American Blood and Crip gangs that had been warring for decades and among Latino gangs, including those on the westside of Los Angeles. There was also an edict declared by the Mexican Mafia, one of the most powerful prison-based gangs in California with ties to many Latino gangs throughout the Southern California region. The edict prohibited drive-by shootings that had for many years led to the deaths of many Latinos and others who happened to be in the line of fire. The result of these truces and the edict was a reduction in gang-related homicides and greater peace within neighborhoods across the city.

One former member of the Shoreline explained that the newfound strength in unity among African Americans and among Latinos, respectively, emboldened each group in confrontations with each other:

In actuality, it probably started...it started positively. There had been various truces being made on the westside. You had Latino gangs were no longer fighting one another. On the entire westside, you had Black gangs who had come together to set aside their differences. This was positive. Where the negative part came in was when these particular entities wanted to, I guess you might say, flex their muscles. They felt good about what was going on and they felt like they could handle things, you know, in my opinion. ...Prior to the truce being made between the Latino gangs and the Black gangs, they might have overlooked one another--somebody saying something that was derogatory towards the other or whatever. They probably would have overlooked it. But, because of the show of force that both parties had, they felt, "hey, we can do this." And basically, I think that's what it was.¹

Boundaries which held groups together in unity also have the potential to become boundaries that define new divisions. In cases where competition defined along such boundaries has attractive economic benefits, new associations can also define new enemies. Competition between gangs over the drug market began to shift from intra-racial in form to inter-racial, particularly after Latino gangs became more heavily involved in the crack cocaine trade alongside African American gangs. Economic

competition defined the construction of group boundaries, among which race had become most salient among many Southern California gangs. Many of the more established street gangs had ties to one of several large prison gang consortiums which were racially homogeneous and had gained substantial influence in the illegal drug trade. Competition in the drug market generated conflicts among street gangs. As Dr. Lorenzo Merritt, executive director of a westside gang prevention program summed up, in a public radio interview on 15 February 1994, "It's pretty common knowledge on the street that EMC (the Mexican Mafia) has said they want to take over the drug trade in any community where they have people, and to move the Black gangs out."²

The consolidation of racially homogeneous prison gangs in California (unlike other cities like Chicago where many gangs are interracial in composition) had a particularly ominous impact on relationships between street gangs. The declaration of war between several prison gangs had led to race riots in many correctional facilities throughout the state. The rise in nationalism, particularly among Latino prison gangs, was especially influential in shaping racial attitudes. In some cases, Latino gangs instituted a form of "ethnic cleansing" that resulted in the purging of non-Latino members or resulted in an organizational split along racial lines.

Race riots had begun to erupt more frequently in the state prison system beginning several years prior to the gang war. Many of these riots were related to long-standing feuds between various prison gangs. One member of the Shoreline described how conflicts in prison "transferred" to the streets:

You probably see the Mexicans that you was in prison with that live in the area. He probably tried to stab you [in prison], so you gonna go after him because he already tried to kill you once. So you already thinking in your mind, "Well, I'm gonna see him again [and] next time he might have a gun or something." So it just escalates. You know what I'm sayin'? I really can't say how it is, but that's the way I feel, you know, that it transfers in there to the streets.³

Just as conflicts in prison bore upon conflicts on the street, the gang war in Venice also added to racial antagonisms in prison. A former Shoreline who was in prison during the outbreak of several race riots explained how the Venice gang war helped fuel several race wars behind prison walls. He described the social dynamic during the time of his incarceration:

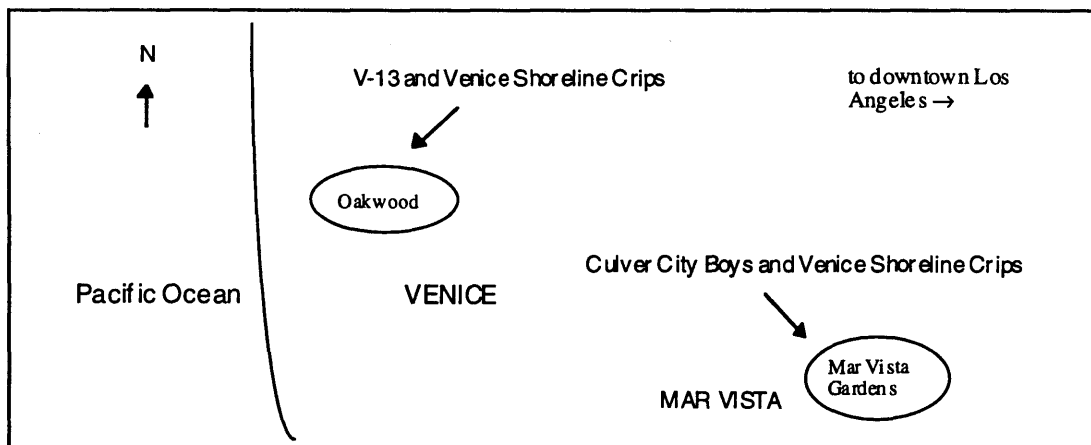
Well, you find that, like if you was from Shoreline, Latinos looked at you differently. There was a definite war goin' on out there [on the streets] that,

throughout the Latino community in the jail system, they knew about. So Shoreline had to watch out not just from V-13s, but from all within [prison]. And as a result of that, it didn't reflect as a Shoreline-Latino thing, it was reflected as a Black-Latino thing. And if you do somethin' to this Black, it's automatically a race war. And it happened on several occasions. Like it happened once or twice when I was in there...a race war. In fact, it started behind a Shoreline thing, but on the back of the other Blacks backing the individuals that happened to be from Venice in there, it escalated into a racial thing, instead of just an individual thing. So, it happens real easily.⁴

This relationship between events in prison and events on the street tended to spur the spiral of escalation and racialization of violence.

Within this backdrops, there were two separate series of incidents in two separate locations that eventually converged in Oakwood where the gang war became centered. One series of events began in the Mar Vista Gardens Housing project and the second began in Oakwood. In its initial stage, each set of conflicts involved a separate set of players. At Mar Vista Gardens, the main players were members of the Shoreline Crips, who resided in that housing project, and the Culver City Boys whose geographic base also was concentrated in Mar Vista Gardens. In Oakwood, the initial set of participants were members of the Shoreline Crips who resided in Oakwood and the V-13s who were dispersed throughout a larger area of Venice including parts of Oakwood.

Map 6.1
LOCATION OF ORIGINS OF THE GANG CONFLICT



Both conflicts involved clashes between African American and Latino gangs, though two different Latino gangs were involved, one in Oakwood and one in Mar Vista, while members of the Shoreline were involved in both locations. (See Map 6.1)

Turf Competition in Mar Vista Gardens

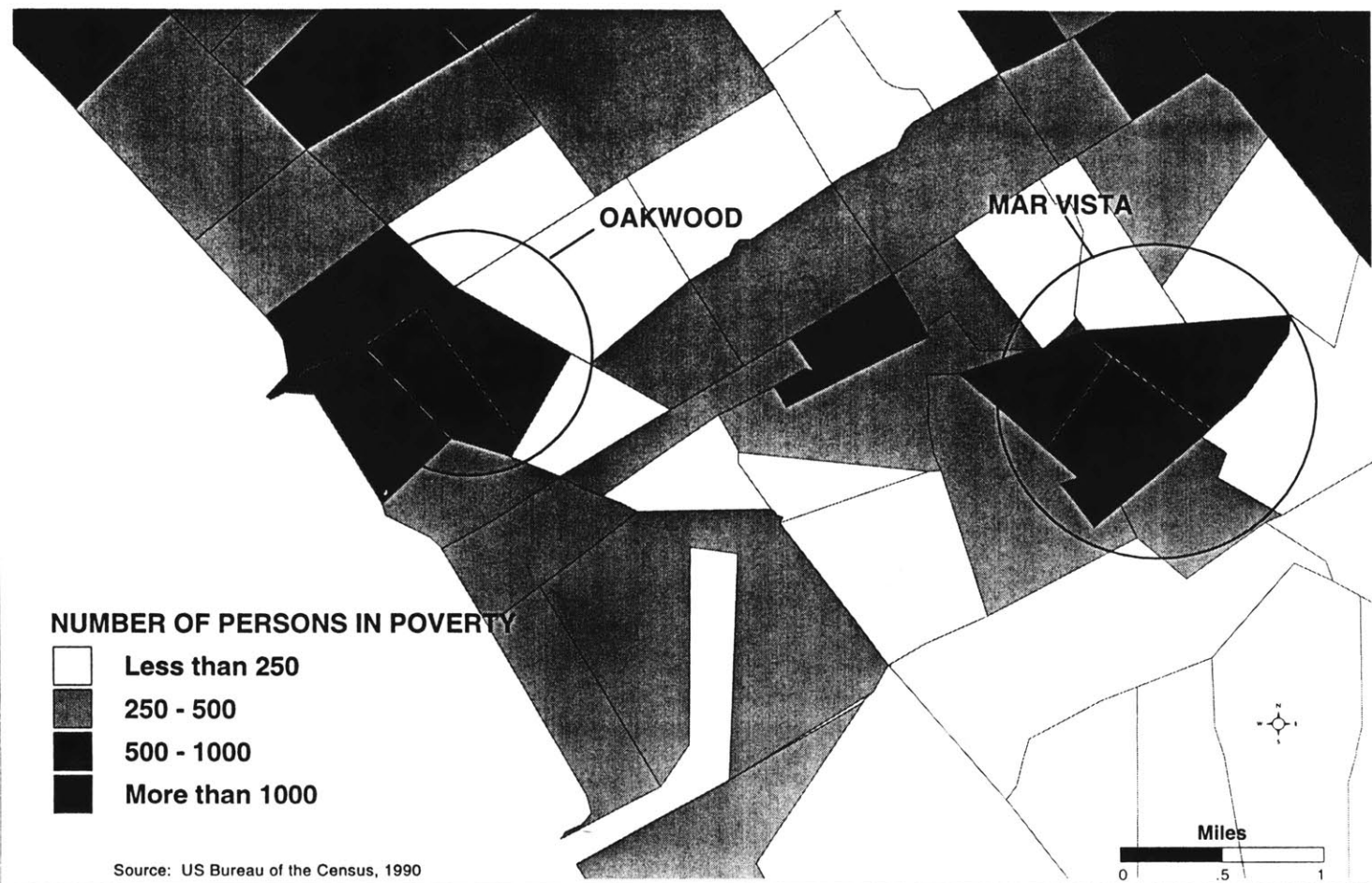
While some members of the Shoreline Crips resided in the Mar Vista Gardens public housing complex, a greater number of their members was concentrated in Venice. The Mar Vista-based Shorelines and the Oakwood-based Shorelines were closely associated and were predominately African American in membership with the exception of several Latino members. The V-13s and the Culver City Boys were both predominately Latino in membership with several Southeast Asian members. These two Latino gangs had an ongoing feud between them, even though some members of both gangs were family relatives. A major difference in gang relations between the two sites was that the Shoreline and Culver City Boys in Mar Vista Gardens had developed highly antagonistic relations, while the Shoreline and V-13 in Oakwood had a history of fairly amicable relations.

Numerous factors contributed to the outbreak of the gang war including the social norms that dictated the rules of gang rivalry as well as competition for economic resources. The two factors became intertwined in an escalating spiral of conflict. Both Oakwood and Mar Vista Gardens have long been lucrative sites for the distribution and sale of drugs. Both neighborhoods are surrounded by more well-to-do residential tracts. The beach areas on the westside are generally more affluent than inland areas of Los Angeles county with the upscale Marina del Rey area only several miles away from both Venice and Mar Vista. In contrast to the surrounding affluence, Oakwood and the Mar Vista Gardens housing project were home to the highest concentrations of low-income residents on the entire westside. (See Map 6.2)

This is the ideal setting for the establishment of lucrative street sales of narcotics in the supply-and-demand driven market. Affluent buyers in close proximity to populations who have less opportunities for employment in the formal economy make for a symbiotic relationship. Both sites became known as "drive-thru" areas where one could purchase various drugs without ever leaving one's car. Narcotics sales had become a major source of family income for many gang members in both locations. Not all who dealt drugs were members of gangs, nor were all gang members or affiliates directly involved in narcotics sales. For those who did participate, however, the drug market provided a fairly steady and sometimes sizable income.

POVERTY IN OAKWOOD AND MAR VISTA

Number of Persons Living Below the Poverty Line



The shift in demographic balance with the decline in the African American population and increase in Latino and Asian populations throughout Los Angeles county between the seventies and the nineties had led to an increase in competition over limited resources in many niches where interests overlap. The drug market was no exception. The Shorelines had long dominated the drug trade in the Gardens, creating some resentments among the Culver City Boys who felt they were not receiving their proportionate share. With the change in demographic balance as the proportion of Latino residents increased, the Shorelines had increasing difficulties defending their traditional turf.

Demographic change was not the only factor intensifying competition over the drug market, however. Change in the use of physical space by the LA Housing Department also led to increased competition in the Mar Vista Gardens. One main road bends through the Gardens, and buyers were known to drive through this main street that begins on the west side of the square-mile project and curves around to its north side. In the years prior to the war, Shorelines were known to sell at the west entrance and Culver City Boys at the north entrance. The physical distance helped to alleviate direct conflict over turf. In the early 1990s, however, the north entrance gate was permanently closed. The rationale for the closure was to seal off traffic related to the drug trade, thereby curbing sales and making the streets in the project safer. The Culver City Boys then moved to the west entrance where the Shoreline operated. Sometime thereafter, there were firebombings of African American residents' homes by Latino residents believed to be members of the Culver City Boys. The Shoreline retaliated in-kind. The popular understanding among African American residents was that the Culver City Boys wanted to run the Shorelines out of the projects so that they could control the street economy. The Culver City Boys, on the other hand, felt the Shoreline had been getting a far too large share of drug sales. This perception was magnified by the much more aggressive and public style of business among the Shoreline as compared to the more discreet style among Latino groups.

The increase in prison gang rivalries in the state prison system also had direct bearing on events at Mar Vista Gardens. A confidential intelligence report by the Housing Authority Police Department stated that members of the Mexican Mafia were paroled to Mar Vista Gardens at around the time that members of the Black Guerrilla Family, a rival prison gang, were also paroled there. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that the releases occurred “just about the time the street gangs turned on each other.”

The article quotes the intelligence report as stating that “the problem is much larger and vastly more complex. The fight is not racial or territorial, but financial. The local gangs are proxies in a larger war.”⁵

From February to March 1993, a series of firebombings continued to rock the projects. Many Black families moved out of the area, and physical skirmishes increased between the remaining Shorelines and the increasingly bold Culver City Boys. Several violent confrontations ensued, including a shoot-out, and the war between the Culver City Boys and the Mar Vista clique of the Shoreline was on. Eventually, the Shoreline were run out of the projects and moved to various parts of the city. Some sought physical and economic refuge in Oakwood with their fellow Shorelines about a mile away.

Personal Conflicts and Family Matters in Oakwood

Meanwhile in Oakwood, the conflict between the Shoreline and V-13 erupted under somewhat different circumstances. First of all, the demographic changes in Oakwood were not as drastic compared to those in Mar Vista. The major reason for this was that many African American residents in Oakwood owned their homes and had lived in the same house over several generations. Second, Oakwood has a much longer history as a place where, as one longtime resident and community activist, Pearl White, put it, “Blacks and Browns have always gotten along.”⁶ Though there was a previous conflict between the V13 and the Shoreline back in 1978, Blacks and Latinos had a relatively peaceful coexistence and friendships between them spanned generations.

In contrast to the Mar Vista Gardens, these long established relationships in Oakwood moderated the level of conflict despite tensions that may have arisen due to economic or demographic changes in the vicinity. Many Black, Latino, Asian and white progressives had worked closely together during the Civil Rights movement during the sixties. Better economic times led to more community-wide activities that promoted cross-racial interaction. There was a stable base of Chicanos who were bilingual, whereas the Mar Vista Gardens had become home to many Mexican, Central American, and Asian immigrants who could not communicate as easily with their African American and other English-speaking neighbors. In Oakwood, there were many community organizations, such as the Community Service Organization (CSO) with roots in the Chicano movement of the sixties, that worked with groups such as the Pearl White Theater, based primarily among African American youth and their families.

The rich history of social organization, cross-cultural cooperation and friendship in Oakwood lends irony to the tragic turn of events which took place around the same time as the firebombings in Mar Vista Gardens. In Oakwood, a series of interpersonal conflicts escalated into gang conflict. The series of incidents in Oakwood began with an argument between two friends--a Black woman and a Latino man--who were allegedly sharing some weed on the steps of a church. Newspaper and oral accounts say that Mark Herrera and Diane Calhoun had an altercation. Diane Calhoun stabbed Herrera with a knife, and Herrera died. Herrera was allegedly connected to the V-13's. Relatives of the Herrera family were said to have given Diane Calhoun time to leave town, warning that her life would be at risk if she stayed. She refused to leave the area and was killed the following April 1993, slightly over two months after the death of Herrera. The Shoreline then allowed time for the shooter to leave, which the individual did.⁷

In the eyes of the gangs involved, there was a level of respect in the way that this incident was handled. Since there were lines of communication between Black and Latino gang members and affiliates, individuals influential among the two gangs were able to mediate the conflict and greater violence was averted. Terms of fairness were reached between the two parties, and alternatives to leave or stay were outlined along with consequences for violating those terms. The two killings were regarded on both sides as an individual family matter and not an issue involving the entire gang. Restraint was maintained between the two gangs in the handling of the dispute. For the next five months, there was relative peace.

From a “family matter” to a “gang war” in Venice

Other conflicts, however, simmered over the summer. Events which spilled over from Mar Vista dovetailed with a sequence of incidents in Oakwood which led to a breakdown of trust and dialogue between the two Venice gangs--the V-13 and the Shoreline Crips. Subsequently, each gang interpreted the others' actions independent from any meaningful communications. Narratives explaining the cause and motives behind each action led to a depiction of the “other” which helped to justify their response to those actions. Events and participants' interpretations of them resulted in a more official declaration of the conflict as a gang war. The redefining of the conflict also signaled a shift in the major line of cleavage from family to gang boundaries. The gang

war that erupted in Venice was centered in the Oakwood neighborhood. The primary publics concerned at this initial stage were the gangs themselves.

Spillover from Mar Vista to Oakwood

Economic competition intensified as a small but active group of Shoreline from Mar Vista moved their drug dealing activities to the Oakwood area of Venice following the firebombings and gang shootings. Their presence in Oakwood lured in members of the Culver City Boys as they would enter the area in search of their rivals. But the Culver City Boys were also rivals with the V-13s though the membership of both gangs were almost exclusively Latino. Culver City was one of the few westside gangs that did not participate in a westside area truce between over twenty Latino gangs, of which the V-13 were a part.

As we have seen, the Shoreline members from Mar Vista had very antagonistic relations with their Latino rivals, the Culver City Boys. Upon entering Oakwood, the same Shorelines did not make a clear distinction between the Culver City Boys and the V-13s. Subsequently, they did not demonstrate respect towards the V-13s into whose territory, along with the Venice Shorelines, they had sought refuge. This created some tensions between Shorelines from Mar Vista and Shorelines from Venice, the latter who felt their Shoreline cousins from Mar Vista were jeopardizing the fragile peace with their longtime neighbor, the V-13.

This situation added to tensions between those Shorelines and V-13s who resided in Venice. Some V-13 associates questioned their Shoreline neighbors as to why they would allow their associates from Mar Vista to take refuge in Venice, as one source explained:

We [the V-13] did talk to (the Shorelines). You have these guys [Shorelines from Mar Vista who fled to Oakwood] running around (Venice) when they got kicked out of someone's neighborhood. That's cowardly. Go handle your business. Why don't you shoot over there instead of running to Venice. The Shorelines say, "they're family." But Culver City wants these guys. They're going to drive through. Shorelines say, "How do we know they're not V-13s?" We tell them, "you should get rid of them then." But they say, "They're family. We can't kick them out."⁸

The Shorelines from Mar Vista and Venice remained as one. In fact, they pulled together more tightly in the face of rumors that Latino gangs bigger than either the Culver City Boys or the V-13s had their eye on African American gangs' share of the

street trade. The thought that larger powers would influence the actions of individuals in the V-13 added to the Shoreline's suspicions and distrust of their neighbor gang.

At least three separate incidents took place over the course of one summer month. These incidents together drew the V-13 and Venice Shoreline more directly into the ongoing feud between the Culver City Boys and the Mar Vista clique of the Shoreline. Alliances among the gangs coalesced along racial group boundaries, though tensions between the Culver City Boys and V-13s remained. The salience of group boundaries from that of gang boundaries to that of racially bound gang alliances was soon to grow more prominent in the conflict.

Three incidents and the breakdown of trust

Three incidents in early fall 1993 appeared to take place between separate groups of people under separate circumstances and were not clearly connected in any retaliatory sequence. Nevertheless, they rolled into one another and created momentum for a larger-scale war. One of the earliest incidents began under similar circumstances to the altercation earlier in 1993 between two acquaintances. What began as an individual man-to-man fight between a Shoreline and a V-13 member ended in a drive-by shooting allegedly committed by associates of the V-13 who felt humiliated by the fight. V-13 members supposedly sprayed the house of a Shoreline member with bullets while family members were inside. The actions were interpreted as an affront to the Shoreline who thought that their member had fought a fair fight and who took offense to the attack on the family residence which endangered friends and relatives not directly involved in their activities. Because of that incident, Shoreline members became suspicious of the intentions of the V-13s.

Nearly three weeks later on 27 September 1997, a murder occurred in an alleyway in Oakwood. According to official reports, Benjamin Ochoa, a familiar and well-liked "transient" of Oakwood was standing with a local prostitute. Ochoa was shot in the head and died at the scene. The suspect arrested was thought to be a member of the Shoreline. Though the incident may not have been intended as retaliation for the drive-by shooting earlier in the month, it nonetheless caught the attention of V-13 members who knew Ochoa. One affiliate of the V13 described the sympathy that ran amongst his peers:

The first guy killed [Ochoa] was 50 years old. Used to be from V-13, grew up in Venice, maybe in the 70s. But cuz he happened to walk down the street, he was killed. People felt for him cuz he was a bum.⁹

Distrust grew over the following week as over a half dozen reports of assaults and attempted murders against Latinos were reported.

Two weeks following the murder of Ochoa on 4 October 1993, a well-known and popular member of the Shoreline by the name of Anthony Bibbs was hit by multiple gunshots in the presence of two women who had been accompanying him to a residence in Oakwood. Both women were injured and Bibbs died at the scene. Bibbs had come from a lineage of well-known Shorelines. He was not only popular among gang members, but was well-liked in the broader community. Stories were shared which promoted him to a larger than life figure. Accounts praised his bravery as he was described as flinging himself in the line of fire to protect the two women who were with him.

The day before the murder of Anthony Bibbs in early October, the V13 and Shoreline had come to a cease-fire agreement negotiated by members of both groups. The shooting of Bibbs came as a shock in the face of the agreement and all trust was lost between the two gangs. One individual with close ties to the Shoreline described their surprise, disbelief and eventual loss of trust:

Nobody thought about, even, not even me, thought it was them that shot Bibbs. Even though these guys had set down together and had said, "We're not in it. We're not going to do anything about it." All of a sudden, Bibbs gets shot, you know. Then everybody thought, "Why they do that?", you know. They just wanted us to put our defenses down so that they could get us, you know. We ain't going to do that no more. ... Oh, there was no more talking after Bibbs got shot, until June. That was the first time anybody sat down and talked was in June after all those people had died.¹⁰

Early on, there was a breakdown of dialogue. This allowed for unverified constructions in the portrayal of the "self" and the "other." Rumors dominated over confirmed evidence and fear began to drive many a decision.

Reading the War: The Increasing Salience of Race

Each gang member had many different identities in addition to or as part of gang membership, such as kinship, family role, occupation, gang clique, gender, race, neighborhood, role or officer within the gang structure, prison gang affiliation, or member of a community organization. For the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on two identity boundaries which were highly salient during the duration of the conflict:

race and place. At the initial stages of the war, the primary publics involved were the gangs themselves. The relationships between them were integrally related to the relative salience of identity group boundaries among gang members. In light of the conflicts in Mar Vista between the Shoreline and Culver City Boys, race had become highly salient relative to place, though these identities cannot be completely separated. In contrast, relations between the two predominately Latino groups--the Culver City Boys and the V-13, had been strained in such a way that place had become highly salient in their interactions. In other words, relations between the four gangs were marked by cross-cutting cleavages and differences in the salience of race relative to place. As the war escalated, the salience of race increased. Race became the major cleavage between the four gangs and place somewhat decreased in relative salience between the two Latino gangs. This section explains how this shift took place.

Gang Readings and the Salience of Race

There is no consensus among residents or agency personnel as to whether or not the "gang war" truly was a "race war." But whether or not it was or was not a race war is less important than the perceptions among many that it was becoming one. If one treated the conflict as though it were a race war, it affected how one responded to it. Paradoxically, a response as if the conflict was a race war could easily turn it into one. And this was increasingly the response among various publics involved. These perceptions and the iteration of responses to them are central to the story of escalation and racial polarization.

Events during the earlier period of the gang war were read or interpreted somewhat differently by each of the two gangs as well as by the local print media which brought the events to the attention of a larger populous. One common thread, however, was the acknowledgment that physical characteristics associated with racial categories rather than known gang identification were becoming increasingly dominant in the pattern of victimization. Both the V-13 and the Shoreline believed the other guilty of racial targeting whether intentionally or by using race along with other physical markers as a default to select victims when uncertain of gang affiliations. Regardless, spread of rumors that racial targeting may be taking place increased the salience of racial identities and led to the emergence of larger publics defined along those salient identity boundaries. News generated internally within the gangs and externally by the local media that the gang war was possibly turning into a race war almost became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Due to the fact that Shoreline members who had fled from Mar Vista to Oakwood did not know the individual V13 in Oakwood like Shoreline members who grew up there and the Culver City Boys who were in search of Shoreline from Mar Vista did not know who in Oakwood belonged to the Shoreline, race became a major identifying marker in the selection of victims in the war. A former Shoreline affiliate explained:

In my opinion, there was more than one gang at war here. You had other gangs that were outside of this particular community that were comin' in. They don't know (Shoreline) gang members per se as V13 might know 'em. So people come in to do shootings. They see Black. They don't know who, what, where. They see Black. And it's an innocent person. Now that automatically puts the Black person that is at this warfare on the same level. [They say] "I don't care, shoot 'em. It doesn't matter.... And what I'm looking for, is just Latinos." So in my opinion, it's kind of how that got thrown in there. It intended and it started with gang members only, but who's to define a gang member when you're comin' down the street where you don't know [the people]. You see a Black person standin' out there [for example], you shoot 'em.¹¹

Both sides seemed to feel that the other gang was more guilty of victimizing non-gang members. On the part of the V-13, one associate expressed frustration with the Shoreline's choice of targets, contrasting it with the V-13's actions:

They [Shoreline] were killing people who were not even V13. On the Black side, all [victims were] connected to the Shorelines. But like the two guys in front of Venice High, no one in V13 knew 'em.¹²

While the V-13 may have felt that the African Americans who were killed were all "connected" to the Shoreline, those affiliated with the Shoreline along with many African American residents in Oakwood pointed to the deaths of several individuals who were not in the Shoreline as an example of Latino gangs' shooting of non-gang members. The murder of these individuals who were independent of the Shoreline increased the intensity of the war.

It was not only the perceived pattern of victimization but the meanings that were read into specific events that led to the increase in racial divisions. The readings on both sides that the other group was targeting individuals based on considerations other than gang membership changed the tenor of the war. The feeling on the part of both gangs that people were being targeted based on their racial identification shifted weight in the

stakes of the war from an issue of turf to the defense of gang reputation linked more directly to their identity as Latinos and African Americans respectively. Reputation linked to racial identity overlaid and often overshadowed any economic issues that may have been the initial impetus for the war.

One of the first sets of interactions which raised suspicion that race was becoming an increasing factor in the gang war can be seen in the explanations for the death of Anthony Bibbs in October 1993. Immediately following his murder, various rumors spread as to the reason for the killing. One rumor that circulated explained that he was hit because he was a known narcotics dealer. The killing of Bibbs reinforced suspicions on the part of the Shoreline that Latino gangs intended to "eliminate them and then take over the whole west side," including the lucrative drug market. As one resident and youth worker continued to explain, "see they had West L.A. They had Santa Monica. They had Culver City. And they didn't have Venice. And Venice had the most money. So that's why they wanted to knock Venice (Shoreline) out of it."¹³ Some believed that prison influences were behind the Latino gangs' actions since an earlier rumor had circulated that the major Latino prison gang in Southern California had a directive out to its affiliated street gangs to take stronger control over the street economy. This reading naturally raised questions as to the driving motives and forces of the Bibbs killing among the Shorelines. In particular, it raised the possibility among the Shoreline and their allies that there may be coordinated efforts among those Latino gangs that had negotiated a westside truce earlier in the year, which included the V-13.

A second rumor added to the salience of race among Shoreline members and friends in relation to the murder. It was hypothesized that Bibbs was targeted because he was known to date Mexican women. For those who suspected this rumor to be true, Bibbs' murder was interpreted as a message from Latino gangs that there was to be no "taking" of Mexican women by Black men. This reading sent an ominous message not only to members of the Shoreline but to that segment of the community with whom relations with Mexican Americans were close.

The long-standing friendships and personal ties between Shorelines and V-13s in Oakwood strained under the weight of events larger than both groups combined. As far as the Shorelines were concerned, Bibbs' death was interpreted as an official message of war from the Latino gangs. Whatever restraint agreements that the V-13s and Shorelines had made soon evaporated. The legitimacy of those individuals who attempted to mediate between the gangs was tainted, especially within the Shoreline

which had not been prepared for such an attack. Within two hours of Anthony Bibbs' death, three Latinos, allegedly from another westside area gang, were shot at while stopped in their car. One teen, John Kelley, was killed in the incident. Kelly, however, was not claimed to be affiliated with either the V-13 or Culver City Boys. The distinctions made on the part of the Shoreline between the different Latino gangs began to fade and phenotypic markers, of which race was central, became increasingly prominent.

From the period between November 1993 and June 1994, what began as individual conflicts escalated into a gang war with clear racial significance. For over seven months, the war continued unabated, stalled only by the Christmas holiday season and the January Northridge earthquake which brought an uncomfortable hush to the neighborhood. Unfortunately, this quiet did not last long and the war soon resumed. From January to June, the number of violent incidents reported to the LAPD resumed an upward trend.

Over time, the gang war became increasingly racialized, but the understanding of how and why it became so differed for each group. Each saw the other as overstepping their bounds and violating codes of gang warfare. Each saw the other as victimizing innocent people and, in turn, retaliated accordingly. Whether or not the accusation of the other overstepping their bounds was merely a justification for their own actions, it is part of the overall interpretive frame through which they define themselves and each other and, ultimately, explain their actions.

From the standpoint of members of the V-13, they were practicing constraint and were not victimizing "innocent" people. But from the Shoreline members' point of view, this was not the case. Shawn Patterson, Cleo Young, and Harold MacDaniel were among those individuals who they felt should not have been killed. Patterson worked as an orderly at the UCLA Medical Center. He was walking home from the bus stop when two young Latino males rode up to him on a bicycle and fired shots at him. He died on the scene. Harold MacDaniel was sitting in his car which was parked at a liquor store on Lincoln Boulevard on the border of Oakwood when he was shot and killed. Neither were known to be active members of the Shoreline. One resident and youth worker explained their interpretation:

It didn't matter because if you were Black or affiliated (with the Shoreline), you were a target. The Mexicans got off just hitting everyone Black, like the woman Cleo. They started getting anyone but a gang member.¹⁴

According to one individual with ties to the V-13, however, they believed the murders by V-13 members did not breach any laws of the street as they were family relations or had some former affiliation with the Shorelines. They could not speak for other gangs, but did not feel they were targeting on the basis of race; MacDaniel and Patterson, in their eyes, represented a strike against the Shoreline specifically and not against African Americans generally. For example, in reference to Shawn Patterson's death, a V-13 associate explained:

I'm sure people who went to school with him know [he's not active Shoreline], but he still lives in Venice. He may not have been from Shorelines but he's tied into them. On the flip side, the Shorelines would back him.¹⁵

But for the friends of these two men who respected their independence from the Shoreline, Patterson's murder was read as added evidence that Blacks were being targeted based on their race, regardless of gang membership.

This difference in readings between members of the Shoreline and V-13 may be partially due to cultural differences in gang life. Among Latino gangs, gang members are forever seen as part of the gang until one goes through a formal process of exiting, a process known to be difficult and sometimes dangerous. Among African American gangs, however, membership is less structured. Individual decisions as to the level and form of participation are generally respected without the degree of accountability expected among many Latino gangs. If one wants to leave the active ranks of the Shorelines in pursuit of other activities such as job or business opportunities, their decisions are generally honored. For the V-13 to make no distinction between active and former Shorelines or between Shorelines and more distant affiliates may reflect the lack of such delineation's amongst their own ranks. For the Shoreline, the murder of former or non-active members or affiliates spurred the racialization of the war within the Black community.

Meanwhile, the high number of retaliatory attacks on Latinos was raising the ire of the V-13 and Culver City Boys who saw the Shoreline as the main perpetrators of racially-motivated attacks. The murder of several Latino men with no remote gang associations or physical appearance of gang involvement raised the fear and anger of Latino gang members and residents. The most highly publicized was the shooting of Anselmo Cruz in the presence of his two young children and a neighbor's child. Cruz was preparing to drive the three children to school one morning when a man clothed and masked in dark clothing approached his car and fired shots at him. He died soon

thereafter. Cruz was a cook in a local LA restaurant. His murder sent shock waves through the broader Latino community across the city. The number of assaults on Latino young men with no known gang associations increased, culminating in the murder of two Latino high school students in front of Venice High School in June 1994.

Was the gang war turning into a race war? Were attacks based on random racial violence against anyone identified as Black or Latino? The V-13 deny it was the case on their part. Shoreline members did not deny racial targeting but viewed it as an act on the part of all parties involved, including LAPD officers who they believed were targeting African Americans over Latinos for arrest and investigation.

Part of the blurriness may also have to do with differences in organizational structure between the two gangs. It would be wrong to assume that all attacks were centrally coordinated just as it would be wrong to assume that there were no centralized decisions shaping the pattern of violence. It is important to note, however, that the organizational structure among the Shoreline allows for greater individual freedom than for Latino gang members. This makes it difficult to know whether the murder of Cruz and others who had no gang affiliation were the act of the Shoreline as an organization or of specific members who acted individually or under a general nod of consent by other Shoreline members. Deep resentments against Latinos were commonly expressed, but whether this translated into deliberately random racial attacks on Latino men by the Shoreline as an organizational policy is difficult to confirm. It is clear, however, that the Shoreline inflicted a greater number of injuries on Latinos than were inflicted upon African Americans over the course of the war. According to LAPD incident reports, the ratio of reported victims (killed, injured and uninjured) of those with Spanish surnames to those without Spanish surnames was approximately 5:9. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Media Discourses and "Race-making"

In the public realm, media and organized community events served as venues for wider discourse regarding the nature of the conflict. Tension existed between the local press which was quick to define the conflict as a "race war" and some of the residents who feared that such a depiction would only add to the growing racial polarization and who tried to redefine the conflict as a "gang conflict" in the public's eye.

Perceptions that the gang war had transformed into a race war were fed by the reporting of the local print media. A mid-November 1993 headline in *The Outlook* newspaper, the major westside daily paper, reporting on the rising number of incidents

that month, read: "Deadly gang war turns to race war."¹⁶ The irony is that those closest to the war did not interpret the conflict as a race war until later, whereas those furthest from the immediate situation defined it as a racial conflict early on. Coverage in the print media tended to frame it in racial terms more squarely than did residents who had access to greater details surrounding the various incidents. If there were questions among participants and direct witnesses as to whether or not the gang war had turned into a race war, there was little question about it among the broader media audience. And whether or not it was seen as a race war between the two gangs, reports that it was only exerted greater force in that direction.

The media was able to spur the racialization of the war in several ways: in its method of reporting, in its publicizing of the body count, and in the impact of its characterization on the behavior of the Black and Latino communities towards one another. One writer, Marilyn Martinez, wrote the majority of articles covering the gang war in the local daily called *The Outlook*. Her main source of factual information was the LAPD. It is common for news reporters to rely on local law enforcement for "official information" regarding crime and arrests. The LAPD has formal guidelines for the release of information to the public and the media, just as there is a standard protocol for the filing of police crime and arrest reports. The common method of description of crime incidents is to give the victim or arrestee's name, race, gender, and age (unless under 18 years old). Occasionally, law enforcement agents disclose a gang affiliation if known.

While the local daily *Outlook* newspaper clearly defined the conflict as a "race war," the *Los Angeles Times* was not so quick to make such proclamations and instead aired competing views. For example, in a 19 December 1993 article titled "Siege mentality hits Oakwood neighborhood," *Times* staff writer Ken Ellingwood juxtaposed LAPD officer Brad Merritt's view that "some of the victims are being killed because of their race, not because they're gang members" with that of a resident. Carmen Gonzales, who chairs a residents group in Mar Vista Gardens rebutted, "It is not a racial war. It is a *gang* war." The *Los Angeles Times*, however, did not give the events the intensive daily coverage that *The Outlook* provided. Also, the Copely newspapers that ran the *Outlook* distributed a free weekly paper under the bannerhead *Venice-Marina News* that reprinted many *Outlook* articles. *The Outlook* was subsequently the major local bearer of gang war coverage and strongly influenced perceptions of residents on the westside.

The selective description emphasizing those visible physical characteristics, including race, age and height tended to reinforce their significance. If racial descriptions become more prominent than gang identification, the boundaries between gangs become blurred next to that of race. The salience of racial group identities becomes pronounced while race becomes more prominent in the reading of events. The public scoreboard created by the media coverage of incidents when reported in racial terms exaggerated the attention paid to race among the gangs themselves whose reputations were at stake. The wider the media announcement of victim counts in the war, the greater the internal pressure placed on gangs to maintain a lead in the body count. Ultimately, the greater the media placed emphasis on the racial characteristics of victims and suspects, the more salient race can become in the counting of bodies for purposes of scorekeeping. In this way, media discourse that shapes the perceptions of events among a wider audience can influence the behavior of direct participants themselves.

It is important to note here that while race was central among salient identities, it is also clear that the attacks were based on other considerations in addition to race. Women, the young, and the elderly were not targeted, though several women were shot or killed in the company of men. The vast majority of the victims were young males in clothing that could be read as gang attire. However, gang-inspired dress had become part of popular culture, and it was difficult to make assumptions based on style of dress. Skin tone, dress, age, and other visual cues indicated the pattern of victimization of Latinos and African Americans.

Since the war was still primarily a gang war, albeit a highly racialized one, physical identification markers that distinguished one as *not* being a gang member were important safety “devices” for protection from the conflict. One African American mother of several children and resident of Oakwood, shared a story that illustrates the significance of physical gender identifiers which she and other women became very conscious of in their choice of attire. She recalled an event which began in the morning as she prepared to take her kids to school:

And I just combed my hair back. I forgot to put my earrings on. So I didn't have no earrings on and I had a black, you know, the big puffy jackets? ...So then my friend was in the car and we was facing one way and my other girlfriend was facing another way. And we were sitting there in the middle of the street talking and, all of a sudden, my girlfriend who was in the car with me

looked up and said, “Ahh! Go (name)! Go bitch, go!” And I see my friend hit the corner. She hit the alley real quick and took off, so I just took off and the car was coming. And I said, “Oh, I hope it’s no cars coming.” So I speeded through and he speeded behind me. And I turned the car and it was, like, turning on two wheels. And the car was behind me and I was speeding real fast. And he was just chasing me. So I thought to take him back to, you know, where the guys were hanging out at, but not knowing they had already been through there and did a shooting and was coming around the corner. (He) thought I was a guy in a car, and chased me down. Because my hair was short and I had on one of those big puffy jackets. I mean, you know, it was scary. She was in the car with me. My baby was in the car with me. She was little. She didn’t know what was going on. She just bouncing around the car, laughing. ...But I guess as they got closer and closer, they seen I was a girl, and they just went on.

[From then on], every time I get dressed, I get up and put my earrings on (laughs).¹⁷

While gender identifiers served to give some residents some sense of protection, flying bullets do not discriminate. Many of the shootings involved multiple gunfire, sending stray bullets in random directions. Many knew that some individuals were at risk of being targeted more than others in the war, but the fact that many bullets did not hit their intended targets instilled fear and trepidation, changing the lifestyles of many families.

Racial distancing and the negotiation of boundaries

The racialized readings of the gang war by the media as well as by the gangs led to the emergence of larger publics which were not defined by gang membership, but rather by racial boundaries, specifically among those who could be physically identified as African American or Latino and more so among young males who could be mistaken as a member of any of the participation gangs. These new publics were drawn into the conflict as the defined character of the war shifted from simply a gang battle to one that was possibly claiming victims on racial grounds.

Regardless of the actual situation, the perception that the gang war was becoming a race war created deep divisions that reverberated throughout the community. Old friendships between Black and Latino families were sometimes strained. Black and

Latino children began to fight on the playground of the local elementary schools. Visits between friends and neighbors were postponed. A general feeling of distrust and distance fell upon many treasured relations. Throughout the ordeal, boundaries and lines of division and alliance were constantly negotiated and renegotiated in both public and private realms.

The fact that lives were being lost carried emotions to heights which brought some individuals to feel and think in ways uncharacteristic under normal circumstances. The violence and pain brought sadness and rage to the surface, expressed in actions and reactions common to wartime. The former Shoreline explained:

I mean, people who wouldn't normally be involved emotionally in these things were involved emotionally. The entire community was upset. And you had people possibly saying, I mean older people, people that are settled in life who wouldn't have condoned what was going on, but after a point, seven or eight deaths, it was like 'do them or you get done,' you know.... So it escalated like that on both sides.¹⁸

The level of fear and anxiety created an atmosphere filled with distrust. He continued to describe the situations in which some found themselves:

It got real serious. People were carrying guns. I mean, not to hurt nobody, but just to defend themselves. At any given point, you move the wrong way, you drive the wrong way...it was at the point that you pull up to a stoplight and have to look to see who's in the car behind you or sittin' in the car next to you. And I think in one instance, they actually had a shoot-out from being just stopped at a stoplight.¹⁹

As in highly combustible conditions, the violence escalated the conflict with great speed and intensity. Conflict and polarization was not contained to the gang population but began to steep into many segments of the residential community.

As more residents came to suspect that the violence represented a race war, greater resentment, fear, and anger grew along racial group boundaries. Distancing and polarization led to a breakdown in communication between many individuals. This made it more difficult for gang members, *veteranos*, O.G.'s²⁰, and their friends and relations to communicate across color lines. While some attempted to maintain communication and find windows of opportunity to mediate the conflict, the tide towards polarization was difficult to turn.

The racial polarization which took place between the Shoreline and V-13, at least for the duration of the war, was uncharacteristic of their past relations, except during a previous conflict in 1978. Many residents who have known members in both gangs reminisced of instances where one supported the other. One resident shared her recollections several months after the war ended:

All V-13s and Shorelines, they all went to school together, they hung out together, they even watched each other's backs, with all the other rival gangs. When V-13 and Culver City Boys [were fighting] and all those guys were comin' into Venice to shoot the V-13s, then the Shorelines was helpin' them. And the same for the Shorelines when the other gangs were comin' in to shoot the Shorelines, the V-13s was helpin' them. You know, that's just how close these kids were with each other. They spent nights over each other's house. They do everything, all the time together....

You know, even to this point, things haven't gotten back to where they're supposed to be. We don't have that. Venice will probably never, ever be the way it used to be. You know, I mean, too much has happened. Too many lives have been lost. Too much blood has been shed.²¹

The racial distancing seemed to take place less among older residents than among children and younger adults. There were many older residents for whom the gang war had little impact on personal relations across color lines. But for children and teens who were in their formative years, the gang war played a larger role in defining race relations and personal identity. One parent worried out loud about how the kids were perceiving the events around them and the impact it had on their understanding of the world. She reflected on the violence:

Some kids was wondering if that's what life is really about. If that's what they have to do to be grown, you know. And that was kind of scary when some kids was like, "Dang! That's what you have to do to be a man." You know? And some kids believed that doing this would make 'em a grown-up. A lot of kids got that [idea].²²

Longtime friendships among adults were also exposed to the tensions in the air. But many proved resilient despite pressures they may have felt from peers or the tragedy of events around them. One Latina resident who had close bonds with an older African American resident told of an encounter upon the murder of her friend's son. After hearing of her friend's son's death, she visited her friend's house.

When I was met at the gate and the family is all black, and here I am Latina going into their home...I really felt bad, you know, to know that one of my people had killed him. It was hard for me to even go over there. But I wanted to go pay my respects because I've known that family for a long time...she and her daughter's kids that she had raised. So I felt close to that family. And that's why I went. But I still, being met at the gate by a lot of blacks, I felt like out of place and kind of, not so much afraid, but just, I don't know, hurt, sad. But then when we went in and Rose received us with open arms, I felt more comfortable, sitting down and, you know, talking to her. And then...I don't know, you know. What do you say? What do you do? You know. It's hard. I mean, you give your condolences, you know, and you offer to help in whatever you can. But, I mean, I don't think she looked at us any different, you know. But...(laughs) once I was outside that gate, you know, I don't know. It was like I could feel, you know, the tension.²³

Some of the young adults who had friends across color lines felt the war took a heavy toll on their relationships. Because so many lives were lost and so many people had been injured, it was difficult to know where the pain and anger might lie and how it might be triggered. It was also unclear who was directly involved in the war. While contact between individual Latino and Black friends might be more manageable, mixed company at larger gatherings came with a great deal of uncertainty and risk. An African American resident explained:

I had a lot of Latino friends that was some good friends and we couldn't communicate. We would see each other, you know. You didn't know if you should speak or not speak because you didn't know what the outcome of it was going to be. This girl I had worked with for years--I couldn't even go to her baby shower. And it was hurting. She was like, "I want you to be there, but I don't want nothing to happen to you."

You never know who would be there. You never know who would trip, see. You never know who was with it and who wasn't with it until it happened. You know. And you never...you don't know who's initiated...or what's going on.²⁴

Both African American and Latino residents often acknowledged the fact that both racial groups faced similar problems of inequality, discrimination, and economic

marginalization. One resident pointed to what she considered the senselessness of the war. She exclaimed:

We both from minorities. We both at the bottom of the totem pole. I mean, they're no better than us. We're no better than them. You know. And I can't understand why people like to fight over turf because nobody, (pause) you don't own this land.²⁵

Despite fairly widespread acknowledgment that neither racial group enjoyed equal socioeconomic status in society, the conflict had gathered a momentum of its own. The escalation of violence involved a chain of events that over time grew to involve greater and greater numbers of people and broader segments of the population. What began in Oakwood as a series of individual and family disputes became, for various reasons, issues of more formal concern to three organized gangs. Events in nearby Mar Vista Gardens rolled into simmering events in Oakwood only to antagonize relationships among the Shoreline, V-13 and Culver City Boys. As the violence between the gangs unfolded, it was unclear whether or not all the victims were indeed members of the gangs involved, raising the question of whether they were targeted according to their racial characteristics over gang identification. The pattern of victimization coupled with rumors and news media accounts reinforced suspicions of racial targeting and, whether or not the gang war was truly a "race war," it became popularly perceived as one. The popularization of this perception fueled resentments and racial antagonisms which, in turn, led to racial distancing and polarization. These events in 1993-94 began only one year after the 1992 civil unrest following the acquittal of LAPD officers tried for the beating of Rodney King. Racial tensions still simmering from the beating of Rodney King and subsequent acquittal tended to fold into the racial divides created during the gang war. The wider the racial divide grew, the more difficult it became for reconciliation efforts across racial lines.

While class boundaries had been the more salient division prior to the war, race superseded class in defining publics under these new circumstances. As one member of the Oakwood Property Owners Association explained the impact on himself and his family, "How did the gang war affect us? Well it took a lot of pressure off us."²⁶ This is not to say that class cleavages were forgotten for the moment, as the "gentrification conspiracy" remained the overarching narrative among many African Americans and low-income residents. Race did, however, become situationally more salient during the period of the gang war, despite the enduring centrality of class.

Reaching across racial divides

Despite the high tide of racial division, covert and sometimes overt acts of racial solidarity were expressed, especially between friends and relations in Oakwood. There was real reason to fear for one's life if you were African American or Latino given the number of assaults and murders of non-gang members who were identified as affiliated based on racial categorization, family ties, or physical attire. Despite this environment, many individuals who had friends and acquaintances of the "other" racial background refused to let the war affect their personal relationships, while many actively sought to bridge the racial divide.

For many of the older adults, expressions of cross-racial solidarity were more boldly and openly shown, due to long established relations as well as less risk of victimization due to age. Others, however, felt restrained in their outward expression of friendship or association in such a racially polarized atmosphere where one's loyalties were pulled in two different directions. These acts of solidarity, whether it be in friendship or in peacemaking or whether overtly or covertly expressed, attest to the persistence of human bonds which held across racial cleavages--bonds that prevented the violence from creating even greater racial antagonisms than it already had.

I refer to these as "a hundred acts of solidarity" for there were many instances of cross-racial unity despite the conflict. For example, one African American family had an acquaintance who was deeply affected by one of the shootings. The acquaintance expressed resentment against Latinos for harm they had done. Members of this family grew concerned and set up a lunch appointment between their acquaintance and one of her Latino friends. This exchange helped to put the conflict into perspective and temper the racial hatred carried by these emotions. One of the family members explained, "The one that got killed, his sister was hating all Mexicans. I said, 'How can you hate *all* Mexicans 'cause *all* Mexicans didn't do the shooting?'" They explained to the sister of the slain victim that "you can retaliate, go shooting the Mexicans, but that's not going to bring your brother back."²⁷ The lunch get-together with her Latino friends and former classmate "eased her" and helped to put things back into perspective.

There was also cross-racial cooperation between Latinos and African Americans in assisting those affected by the war. This included everything from obtaining victim's insurance to finding attorneys for cases. Longtime activist Pearl White had long worked

with residents of all racial backgrounds in the Oakwood community. During the war, she and others tried to help families find the resources they needed:

We worked with lawyers for both sides and a lot of people didn't even know that. I got lawyers for the Mexicans and the Blacks. ...So, I always had a positive relation with both groups.²⁸

She and Melvyn Hayward of the Pearl White Theater both reached out to one of the Latino youths who shot and injured their friend Jimmy Powell, a youth outreach worker for Project Heavy West and Oakwood resident. Powell had been walking along the sidewalk in Oakwood when a Latino youth whom he knew fired shots from across the street. Powell shared his thoughts about the incident and how they were able to work through the events that transpired and continue their relationship:

The guy who shot me apologized to me. Melvyn talked to him and Pearl went to court with him. He (later) called Pearl. He wanted to go back to school. Venice High School called me and he had to come talk to me. ...²⁹

They smoothed out their relationship and Powell continued to work with Latino and African American youths on campus as well as in the community. His exemplary actions in helping groups to mediate conflicts across color lines at Venice High School even after the shooting sent a message that people can overcome great obstacles to work for peace. He reflected, "Maybe it was good I got shot. Maybe I could be an example. I could have gone and just stayed home [after that]."³⁰

Another story told by a member of the Shoreline who was imprisoned during the war shared an incident in which he made a personal agreement with a friend of his who was a member of the V-13. The agreement was that if there was a race riot, that they would be obliged to join the fight, but they would not hurt each other. He recollected the discussion with a fellow V-13 inmate:

But I can tell you this right here, it was two Mexicans up in there from Venice that I knew from the street that I kicked it with. We just kicked it before the war jumped off in prison. And they got at me. They told me, 'Check this out homie. If something ever jump up between the races, man, just go your way. I'm going my way. You know what I'm saying? You just get at another Mexican. I get at some more Blacks, but we ain't touching each other like that...you know what I'm sayin'...'cause we grew up together.' I respected that and when it happened, they did that. You know what I'm saying? And all the

people that's Black from Venice did the same thing. You know what I'm saying? That's the respect that we had.³¹

In these instances, bonds of friendship transcended racial divides, even in the most combative situations.

In other words, while the salience of racial identities became a primary boundary of group division for many, it was not primary for everyone in the midst of the widening racial divide many bonds of friendship and trust remained strong. As the war went on and more victims fell, these ties were put under the test of increased pressures. As greater numbers of "innocent" people were hurt, however, anger towards the actions of gang members rose within the neighborhood-at-large. Individuals and groups began to take more direct steps to try to halt the violence. Peace marches were held. Ministers preached peace to their congregations. Meetings were organized. Messages were relayed to the gangs. And positive alternatives such as jobs were offered by several community organizations and businesses. Cross-racial publics were present throughout, though their presence was not always visible. Acts of solidarity demonstrated by them represented an important resource that could be supported on the road to peaceful resolution. How these community-based efforts were seen and whether or not these efforts would collaborate with those of law enforcement agencies was mixed. Two distinct approaches among law enforcement agencies emerged. It is to these approaches we now turn.

¹ Interview with anonymous #23, 13 April 1995, Los Angeles.

² Aired on KCRW public radio program in Santa Monica, "Which Way L.A.?" hosted by Warren Olney, 15 February 1994.

³ Interview with Anonymous #15 21 December 1995, Los Angeles.

⁴ Interview with Anonymous #23, 13 April 1995, Los Angeles.

⁵ Jesse Katz, "Clashes between Latino, Black gangs Increase," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 1993.

⁶ Interview with Pearl White, 10 July 1995, Los Angeles.

⁷ Interviews with Anonymous #2, 10 August 1994 and 22 September 1994, Los Angeles.

⁸ Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.

⁹ Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.

¹⁰ Interview with Anonymous #2, 10 August 1995 and 22 September 1994, Los Angeles.

¹¹ Interview with Anonymous #23, 13 April 1995, Los Angeles.

¹² Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.

¹³ Interview with Anonymous #14, n.d., Los Angeles.

¹⁴ Interview with Anonymous #14, n.d., Los Angeles.

¹⁵ Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.

¹⁶ Martinez, Marilyn. "Deadly Venice gang war turns to race war," *Venice-Marina News*, A-1, 25 November 1993, reprinted from *The Outlook*.

¹⁷ Interview with Anonymous #17, 21 June 1995, Los Angeles.

¹⁸ Interview with Anonymous #23, 13 April 1995, Los Angeles.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Veteranos and O.G.'s refer to the veteran gang members or original gang members who were often sought for advice among the younger set, but were less active or non-active in gang activities.

²¹ Interview with Anonymous #17, 21 June 1995, Los Angeles.

²² Ibid.

²³ Interview with Anonymous #31, 22 September 1995.

²⁴ Interview with Anonymous #17, 21 June 1995, Los Angeles.

²⁵ Interview with Anonymous #17, 21 June 1995, Los Angeles.

²⁶ Interview with Anonymous #25, 29 June 1995, Los Angeles.

²⁷ Interview with Anonymous #3 with family, 27 June 1994, Los Angeles.

²⁸ Interview with Pearl White, 10 July 1995, Los Angeles.

²⁹ Interview with Jimmy Powell, 30 October 1995, Los Angeles.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Interview with Anonymous #15 and 16, 21 December 1995, Los Angeles. While this may have been agreed upon and respected by the older gang members, it is important to note that not all of the younger set shared these same bonds.

CHAPTER 7

FIREFIGHTERS: SUPPRESSION FROM WITHOUT

Two approaches to the gang war: Firefighters vs. Mediators

Police and other law enforcement institutions became the most visible and direct agents of government intervention in response to the gang war. As is common in cases of social conflict involving physical violence, the police were dispatched as the first line of intervention. Among law enforcement efforts, two distinct methods emerged. One was a high-suppression “firefighter” approach that emphasized the apprehension of as many gang members as possible to stamp out the flames of violence. The other was a “mediation” approach that tried to get the gangs to mediate an end to the war from the inside-out.¹ These two strategies were based on two different analyses of the problem and led to two very different outcomes.

The dominant firefighter policy approach that emphasized the use of gang suppression tactics was met with a great deal of controversy within the affected neighborhoods, especially given the racial polarization that had developed. This strategy emphasized intensive suppression methods to remove identified gang members from the area and to smother the movements and activities among those remaining. Tactics included the use of search and seizure raids, increased patrols, surveillance, and tracking of arrested suspects to insure maximum sentencing. In contrast, the mediation approach emphasized bringing the efforts of law enforcement agencies, gang members, residents and community organizations together to find a path towards negotiated settlement. It was based on an assessment of competing interests and viewpoints among various players and on a strategy of coupling government and community initiatives so that they complemented one another to open avenues for negotiation. This latter approach led to a truce in June 1994 after ten long months of fighting.

As was summarized in the previous chapter, the main publics that emerged included gang members, defined along gang membership in the three organizations, and residents, who grouped largely though not exclusively along racial group boundaries as the war was beginning to be defined in racial terms. In addition, there emerged publics defined as networks of law enforcement officers who grouped according to their subscribed approach --firefighters and mediators. In the face of escalating violence, law enforcement agents took numerous actions which were interpreted by other publics in a variety of ways. The actions and contests over the interpretation of them led to a

reconstitution and realignment of these publics based on a shift in the relative salience of identity boundaries among individuals involved in or affected by the events. Publics responded to law enforcement activities based on their interpretations and on the techniques of power available to them, including violence as well as persuasion. The interpretation of events among participants and observers was hotly contested. As individuals constructed and adopted particular narrative interpretations, the constellation of publics realigned. A new set of opportunities and constraints were subsequently laid for the next round of interactions.

In this and the following chapter, I will compare the two approaches and the outcomes of each. I will contrast the problem definitions and prescribed interventions. I will describe the interpretive narratives by which a selection of publics made sense of the events that ensued as well as the responses by them to those interventions. I argue that the success of the network-based mediation approach over the police-led suppression approach was based on the advantage that the mediation approach had in traversing multiple publics and understanding the various efforts, viewpoints, and interests among them. This allowed for some semblance of a strategy to emerge and for the identification of windows of opportunity to bring groups into dialogue. In particular, the mediation approach was able to deracialize the conflict by shifting the primary cleavage from racial back to gang boundaries. The firefighter approach, on the other hand, had the effect of reinforcing racial group boundaries, particularly among African Americans in such a way as to make it more difficult to open cross-racial dialogue or forge greater cooperation among African American residents and others who wanted to see an end to the fighting.

Problem definitions and prescriptions for intervention

Publics and Law Enforcement: Networks Among the Maze

The multi-layered systems of law enforcement and criminal justice involved many different institutions tied together by a maze of bureaucracy.² Locally based agencies responding to the gang war included the departments of police, parole, probation, city attorney, district attorney, fire, and housing. Federal law enforcement agencies were also operating in the neighborhood, namely the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). Each agency had its own mission, powers, tasks, incentive structures, decision-making processes, range of discretion, and specific policy instruments. Each agency had

internal protocols as well as interagency protocols particular to the culture of each law enforcement institution.

Within each agency, individuals also acted upon their own moral convictions and personal biases. These did not necessarily conflict with institutional rules or guidelines, but agents of those institutions enjoyed broad discretionary powers so that individual beliefs and attitudes were also reflected in official responses. Networks of law enforcement agents across agency boundaries coordinated their work based on agreement around common strategies and assessments of the problem. A shared identification as law enforcement personnel coupled with a shared approach to the problem tied together select personnel in working networks. For the purposes of analysis, we can refer to these networks of firefighters and mediators as publics.

There was no one single coordinating body among government agencies in response to the gang war even though several interagency bodies existed to coordinate law enforcement and community activities. The Interagency Gang Task Force under the Office of the District Attorney was a standing committee of social service organizations and law enforcement agencies, but it did not serve as a coordinating body for this specific conflict. A neighborhood coalition called Oakwood United was also a standing consortium of community organizations and representatives from government agencies including the LAPD concerned with problems in Oakwood. This consortium facilitated the sharing of information and initiated an economic development project for youth, but it had no official capacity for coordinating government and community responses to the gang war. The LAPD also initiated a committee consisting of law enforcement and other governmental agencies, community organizations and social service agencies serving the Oakwood neighborhood. Participation in the LAPD-initiated network was on an invitation-only basis and served information sharing purposes only. None of these bodies actually coordinated strategies to deal with the war, due mainly to the absence of a unified view as well as a lack of trust and cooperation among many of the groups and individuals present. Instead, ad hoc interagency bodies and informal networks were formed out of which specific strategies and actions coalesced. The result was a set of parallel network-based interagency attempts to intervene in the war, some of which overlapped and others which, at times, stumbled over one another. In addition to this, there were two more covert law enforcement task forces, including a task force within the FBI and an interagency task force that included representatives from the city attorney, police, parole and probation offices which focused specifically on Oakwood.

Calling on Firefighters to “Cool It Out”

When the violence broke, the majority of law enforcement agencies took the approach of rounding up as many gang affiliates as possible, likening the removal of suspected gang members to firefighters clearing the brush surrounding a fire. The logic was that the more gang members off the street, the less energy there would be to fuel the war. The expectation was that the war would eventually die down through attrition. According to the firefighter approach, it was important that law enforcement agencies pursue all avenues to arrest suspected gang members on any charges applicable and detain them for as long as possible. As Councilwoman Ruth Galanter explained:

We flooded the area with law enforcement because people in danger of being murdered need to be protected. So that was the first thing. Let's just cool it out. Try to stop the killing. Try to get hold of as many killers as we can. Get their weapons off the streets and get them off the streets.³

The prescription for intervention entailed numerous operations coordinated among a variety of agencies. The FBI would intensify surveillance and apprehension of the Shoreline Crips as part of their county-wide gang surveillance project. This was part of their fight against organized crime and drugs. They worked with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) which focused on the confiscation of firearms. The LAPD would increase patrols in the area and carry out a variety of suppression operations. The LAPD worked closely with city and district attorneys who would prepare abatement proceedings or subpoenas for a variety of charges related to the gang war and any previous infractions of the law, from civil codes to criminal codes. Probation and parole offices would rearrest probationers and parolees on the slightest violations. Special units of the LAPD such as Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH), narcotics, and vice would allocate additional resources to operations in Venice. Arrestees would be more carefully tracked and insured the maximum sentence if convicted. All of these efforts were designed to remove the firewood and smother any remaining flames.⁴

There was controversy within participating agencies and among residents who witnessed their activities. Four separate concerns were raised from various corners. First, unless every last member or potential gang member was arrested or otherwise restricted in their activity, the war could continue. As one participant said, "gang abatement is a joke. For every gang member who leaves the gang or is put in prison, there's just another right behind to take his place."⁵ Certainly, the size of the gangs

involved did make abatement goals difficult. Police estimated that each of the three gangs had several hundred members and affiliates, though not all were active in the area as some were in prison or had relocated out of the immediate area. Second, each gang had the potential to call for “back up” from other gangs with whom they associated. The conflict had the potential to spread to other areas of the city as direct participants in the war saw their troops dwindling in numbers and could have asked for assistance from gangs in other parts of the city. Observers did express concern that calls for assistance could trigger a chain reaction leading to the spread of violence. Third, if law enforcement actions were perceived as biased against one group over another, they could intensify the conflict by fanning racial antagonisms and fueling suspicions that there was a conspiracy against one or another group that emanated from higher authorities in government. Real or perceived bias on the part of state agencies has historically escalated intergroup antagonisms, particularly in conflicts involving violence (Horowitz 1985, Ryan 1990). And fourth, without an understanding of the specific roles that individual gang members played within their respective gangs, moderating forces who may be able to positively affect the situation could be removed. “Shotcallers” are often targeted by law enforcement agents. But in some cases, these individuals may be the most capable and prone to calling a halt to the violence.

This firefighter approach was reflective of the analyses of gangs and gang activity described in chapter five. This analysis, particularly that articulated by the former LAPD police chief Daryl Gates, viewed gang members as a subhuman element without morals to guide their behavior nor value for human life, including their own. It cast all those identified with gangs in the same category with little differentiation among and within gangs, consideration of organizational dynamics, or belief in the possibility that individual gang members would, under specific circumstances, steer the group towards more peaceful resolution of violent conflict. This analysis of gangs paid less attention to their social integration within the community or to the social dynamics between various publics that could affect the situation than to rounding up as many of them as quickly as possible. But to remove them wholesale from the community would have repercussions throughout the social networks of which they were part. Instead of working in tandem with those within these social networks to persuade or pressure those involved in the war to end the violence, the dominant view among law enforcement agents involved was that a frontal assault on the gangs would be the most

effective course of action. The foundation for this approach can be more closely examined in the LAPD plan of operations in Oakwood, titled "The Oakwood Plan."

The Oakwood Plan: A Problem Defined

As reviewed in Chapter Five, an LAPD plan of operations for the Oakwood neighborhood entitled, "The Oakwood Plan," presented a portrait of the crime problem that focused on the Shoreline Crips and secondarily on the V-13. The "criminal element" in Oakwood was referred to in the language of the text as "predators". One of the patrol units was named the Pacific Area Predator Arrest Team (PAT). PAT was "responsible for developing, maintaining and updating a list of those persons who by virtue of their demonstrated aggressive repetitive criminal behavior, can be classified as criminal predators."⁶ The plan went on to state that:

Currently, PAT personnel have identified over thirty predators who either live in or apply their evil trade in Oakwood. Most of these individuals are also members of either the Venice Shoreline Crips or the Venice 13 gangs. Past police experience in Oakwood has determined that much of the criminal activity is being perpetrated by members of various criminal gangs.⁷

Along with other sections, the picture of the problem as painted by the Oakwood Plan depicted a group of preying criminals who pose a danger to law-abiding residents and police officers alike due to the violent behavior associated with the local drug trade.

The Venice Shoreline Crips, or the Shoreline, was distinguished from other gangs by their integration in the social fabric of the local African American community. The Oakwood Plan stated:

The Shoreline Crip community is different than any other black gang because of its homogeneous roots. Essentially, the gang is a web of criminal associations within a larger network of historical criminal association between about a dozen repeat offender families. The more the families of Oakwood are studied, the more it becomes apparent and the more you understand that almost everyone is related through either marriage or out of wedlock births."⁸

Various families were named as "prominent criminal families where repeat offenders have spanned generations."⁹ Family relations were also mentioned to illustrate the degree of intermarriage within the community. The "web of criminal associations" and the interrelatedness of families were viewed as problematic in several ways. Many in law enforcement assumed that most families were reliant on the income generated from cocaine sales so that they would protect law offenders. Since everyone was seen as

interrelated, officers had little faith that residents were not covering up for friends and relations.

The plan identified political organizations tied to African Americans of Oakwood, such as the Santa Monica chapter of the NAACP and the Rainbow Coalition, as also problematic to the extent that they exerted political influence restricting the activities of the LAPD. These local organizations assisted residents' efforts to curb police misconduct by filing charges on behalf of residents. The implied "incestuous" behavior of gangs, residents and political organizations created tensions between law enforcement agencies and constituencies which would otherwise be considered "legitimate."

This view, while based on a set of evidence, simplifies the much more complex nature of attitudes that residents held towards police. Many African American residents interviewed, for example, would be willing to cooperate more closely with law enforcement officers to curb criminal activities if 1) there were more positive alternatives that youth could be steered towards, 2) if an attitude of greater respect was shown by officers towards members of the African American community, and/or 3) anti-discriminatory reforms were made in the establishment and enforcement of criminal laws. Many voiced sadness towards the deteriorating social effects of drugs on friends and relations, but did not feel empowered with their resources or abilities to make a significant turnaround. The "broken windows" approach of heavily enforcing minor infractions such as broken tail lights was often seen as making life harder and more burdensome for those who are struggling the hardest to survive, let alone trying to address some of these problems within the neighborhood.

Implementating of the firefighter approach

This traditional gang suppression approach was led by a network of personnel in two city agencies, the Los Angeles Police Department and the Office of the City Attorney, with cooperation and assistance from other agencies including the County Office of the District Attorney, County Probation, and various city agencies. The Office of the City Attorney and the LAPD had been working together on a number of high-profile gang abatement operations for several years before the Venice gang war, including a controversial but officially praised "clean up" operation on Blythe Street in the northern valley section of the city.

There were individuals in the two agencies with a long history of work on cases involving Oakwood residents. They had a strong commitment to ridding the neighborhood of crime and its perpetrators. From their experience, they believed that a substantial proportion of crime on the westside involved members of local gangs among which the V-13, Culver City Boys and the Shoreline Crips were some of the "most wanted." The two city agencies were also central to the formulation and implementation of the Oakwood Plan. Though the atmosphere of teamwork had diminished with the turnover in leadership at the top and in the LAPD's Pacific Division with the appointment of a new captain, there remained interpersonal ties between the two agencies. Moreover, similarities remained in their approach as described previously.

The LAPD's main strategy was to flood the area with patrol cars, which it did after it was clear that the violence was escalating.¹⁰ Lt. John Weaver of the LAPD's Operations West Bureau stated that there were times when there were more than 100 officers assigned to Oakwood during a 24-hour period. That translated to ten to twelve patrol cars with several officers per car at all hours of a given day. A fellow officer added, "That is almost a car in every third block because it's such a small area."¹¹ Indeed, this was an unprecedented number of officers assigned for any amount of time to an area approximately 1.2 square miles. In order to staff the area at this level, officers were brought in from other units in addition to the Pacific Division, including the CRASH unit and the metropolitan division, specializing in gang-related and drug activities, respectively.

In addition to increasing the number of officers assigned to Oakwood, the LAPD worked with the city attorney's office and other agencies in coordinated efforts. One major joint operation consistent with traditional gang suppression approaches was employed in the early stages of the war on October 27, 1993. Numerous law enforcement agencies under the lead agency of the Department of Fire and Safety gathered over 200 documents in a subpoena against a number of men identified as members of the Shoreline Crips who were suspected of participating in acts of arson earlier in the year. A search warrant was issued by the Los Angeles County Superior Court on October 21, 1993. The judge issued the warrant "as a result of an ongoing investigation of a series of fire bombings that occurred in the Oakwood area of Venice, California during a six-month period, from February to August."¹² The timing of the operation occurred at the start of the war, following the murder earlier that month of Anthony Bibbs whose death along with the murder of Benjamin Ochoa contributed to

the initial escalation of conflict. The preparation and processing of the warrant had begun prior to the start of the gang war. Whether or not the precise timing of the serving of the warrant was altered in light of the war's outbreak is unknown. It was certainly hoped, however, that the arrest of Shoreline affiliates listed in the warrant would help to quell the current violence.

The search and seizure operation was highly organized in which the LAPD conducted pre-dawn raids of eighteen residences in search of thirteen named suspects. West Bureau CRASH, Pacific Division detectives, West Bureau Narcotics, Oakwood Task Force, and Metro divisions of the LAPD coordinated tasks and assignments. The majority of homes, thirteen of the eighteen, were located in Oakwood. Police reports indicate that approximately 200 officers were involved on the morning of the operation. One hundred and fifty officers met at the West Los Angeles station at 2 a.m. to begin the search. LAPD officers issued warrants and served subpoenas at the homes at approximately 3 a.m. Among the items listed to be seized were matches, lighters, lighter fluid, empty bottles, utility bills, dyes, evidence of gang affiliation with the Shoreline Crips, Nike tennis shoes with black or blue laces, Los Angeles Raiders jackets, photos of gang members, phone and address books, evidence of sale or use of crack, financial records, and firearms. Summary reports state that at the end of the operation that morning, five men were arrested for charges named in the warrant, four were arrested on unrelated charges, and 40 firearms were seized along with \$40,000 in cash.¹³

This search and seizure operation was the largest gang-suppression operation in terms of the utilization of resources for a single activity. On a more ongoing basis, other features of the firefighter approach took the form of increased coordination among law enforcement agencies, the securing of maximum sentences for gang-related offenses, strict enforcement of civil and criminal laws, and closer tracking of criminal cases related to the gang war.

Contesting Interpretations among multiple publics

"Targeting": Reinforcing the Racial Divide

Interviews with numerous residents spanning a cross-section of ages and political persuasions reveal some of the effects of the operation. One effect was to increase the salience of racial group boundaries, particularly among those who identified themselves as African American. Because the raids were conducted exclusively on the

homes of African Americans, it was seen as reflective of law enforcement bias against their racial group as a whole. Although the all-African American racial composition of suspects listed on the warrant was understandable in light of the fact that it was issued in relation to the investigation of the Shoreline in relation to previous arson fires and not the ongoing gang war, the perception that police were targeting the Shoreline over the Latino gangs nevertheless dovetailed with other incidents which together formed a picture of police conspiring against African Americans while favoring Latinos.

The perception of police bias or “targeting” took on even greater meaning in the context of the broader metanarrative of “gentrification” discussed in chapter four. The fact that raids were conducted exclusively on homes of African American residents gave credence to the idea that police responses to the violence were part of a larger plan to remove African Americans from Oakwood. Many did not believe that police officers had any interest in stopping the violence since they suspected collaboration between many of the officers and real estate speculators. The more violence that was unleashed, the lower real estate prices dropped and the greater the exodus of particularly African American and Latino residents from the area. A resident employed at the Venice Skills Center echoed the fear many African Americans had with further gentrification and the role of police in furthering Black exodus:

They covered a lot for the Latinos. They picked up Black people, not a lot of Latino guys. They picked up the Black people because they wanted them dead. So that was a lot of tension because it was a one-sided deal. They only wanted the Blacks out of here. They said they wanted Oakwood and this was a way for the white superiors to get Oakwood back, is to kill up the Black people in here.¹⁴

The belief that at least some police officers were not truly committed to stopping the violence due to reasons related to gentrification was fairly widespread among African American residents throughout Oakwood. Several stated that though police were targeting African Americans, they believed that it would be only a matter of time that low-income people of all racial groups would be driven out of the neighborhood.

The fact that the captain of the Pacific Division was of Latino descent raised even greater suspicion among African American residents about the motives behind police actions, as one resident speculated:

If they raided the Mexicans’ houses, and if they took some of them in and took some into jail, then maybe we wouldn’t feel that way. ... When they made those raids, that’s when people thought it was a racial thing. We had a Mexican

captain at that time. I'm not sure if that had something to do with it. I don't know.¹⁵

But others did not give any significance to racial differences within the ranks of the LAPD. Another resident with associations with the Shoreline said, "The police is the police. Whatever color they come in has nothing to do with nothing. You know. It's their whole attitude--the makeup of the police and what they're all about."¹⁶

A second and related impact of the raids was to increase the level of both rage and desperation among Shoreline members who read police actions as "disarming" their forces and aiding their Latino adversaries. From the point of view of Shoreline members, the "raids" and other law enforcement actions were viewed as an effort by the police to undercut them in their battle against the Latino gangs. One resident who had family members associated with the Shoreline explained the impact of the raids on the perceptions among African Americans he knew:

They [Shoreline] were already feeling mistreated. The Blacks felt like it was a race thing. When they raided the houses, how many Hispanic homes was raided? They were disarming us. Taking our weapons. And they was taking people's guns from people and didn't give them slips. They just took the guns and let [the people] go. They probably took them and gave it to the Mexicans.¹⁷

The confiscation of the cache of arms was compared to the embargo of arms against Bosnia in their war against Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Shoreline members defined the war, not as a "Black vs. Brown," but a "Black vs. Brown-and-Blue" war. Many Shoreline and their relations believed, as was often said, "It wasn't just a Black and Brown thing, it was a Black, Brown and Blue thing. So the Blacks had to worry about the Brown *and* the Blue." Shoreline members felt that police targeted African Americans for arrests throughout the war. One member who, during the war, had been in state prison shared his personal observations from his time there:

It seems that the police, they knew what they was doing because they was, you know, arresting majority of Black people. Cause if you just go to jail, from the whole war, all of them is Black. They got, like,...out of the whole war, they got, like, six Mexicans that's in jail. (They got) 'round about at least thirteen, fourteen, fifteen (Blacks) and all of them for murder. But they only got, like, six Mexicans. And they knew what they was doing.¹⁸

The V-13 were aware of the law enforcement crackdown on the Shoreline, but they also believed they were under high law enforcement scrutiny. The FBI was

covertly conducting a separate investigation of the Mexican Mafia, one of the prison-based gangs which brought some of their associates under surveillance.¹⁹ They also felt that the Shoreline had a geographical advantage since they were concentrated in a small residential area where their families lived. The V-13 tended to be residentially dispersed over a wider area without the protection that a geographic concentration may provide.

One V-13 associate explained:

Blacks have an edge cuz they families live there. If V13s wanted to get someone, they had to go in. A Mexican can't hide themselves. They're stopped by police or hit by Blacks.²⁰

While V-13 members may have faced this "disadvantage," they did not believe they were targeted by the police any more than were the Shoreline. They may refer to the police as a "third gang," but they did not see the police siding with them against the Shoreline as the latter believed.

For those who did not object to the search and seizure operation per se, many did feel that police acted disrespectfully towards affected families. The result was an increase in mistrust and resentment among many African American residents towards the police. Narrative accounts of the treatment of family members in their homes when the raids occurred circulated, creating more anger within the community towards police actions. Two major complaints that were voiced concerned the disrespect on the part of police officers that was felt by the families and a feeling among some of the affected families that police searched the wrong homes. In regards to the latter complaint, incorrect information on suspects is not uncommon. Information on suspects entered into databases or files become obsolete and are not regularly updated. Also, suspected youth who are questioned or held by police do not always give their correct address and instead give those of friends or relatives. Only several of the fifteen suspects named on the subpoena were found on this search. However, police allegedly confiscated numerous weapons and arrested several individuals who were not named on the subpoena but were suspected on other grounds.

A lawsuit was filed on behalf of a number of residents whose homes were searched. One of the attorneys assisting with investigations who spoke with many of the families who were connected to the lawsuit described his impressions of the operation:

It seems to have upset too many innocent people. In one house a kid was sick. The family said the baby can't come outside, but stands outside for one hour.

One very old man was treated extremely rudely and roughly. He was 75 years old, very old and very sick, but was dragged out of the house. Many not involved were handcuffed and treated badly in the presence of their children. A lot of people were forced out of their home wearing very little. It was extremely embarrassing. It was humiliating, deliberately humiliating.²¹

From the perspective of police, on the other hand, this particular set of raids was less intrusive than previous practices under Operation Hammer. Operation Hammer was a very controversial anti-gang program launched in 1988 in which police conducted often large-scale sweeps and search and seizure operations to arrest those thought to be involved in illegal gang activity. This operation resulted in tens of thousands of arrests, primarily of young African American and Latino men. On one night, officers in Operation Hammer were reported to have arrested 1,453 people, of whom 1,350 were released with no charges filed.²² Officers in this more recent operation, however, had been instructed to avoid the legal problems resulting from Operation Hammer. In this raid on suspected Shoreline residences, police officers videotaped the interior of the homes for the purpose of avoiding costly lawsuits as in previous cases.

Firefighter Rebuttals

Police officials have vehemently denied any intentional targeting of African Americans over Latinos. The search and seizure operation was not seen as a discriminatory act meant to handicap the Shoreline in the war since it was related to arson investigations that had begun even before the gang war started. In regards to routine arrests on the streets, several CRASH officers explained why there may be a perception that African Americans are apprehended in higher proportions. They attribute it to the ease with which they can apprehend Shoreline. LAPD Lieutenant John Weaver and his detective explained the difficulty of policing the V-13 or Culver City Boys with equal success due to their style of operations:

Lieutenant: They deal drugs different from Black gangs. Hispanic gangs don't stand on corners and sell rock. They sell it in their homes or in apartments or places like that, so you don't see them standing out in the street like you do the Black gang members. Which is very frustrating when you're trying to work the drug problem.

Detective: The other thing in the Hispanic is this family and community thing, so to get into it, you have to be part of it. You just don't get an undercover police officer to go in. There's more of a family, community... I mean, there's part of

that within the black gang, but it's not nearly as strong. Not even a small percentage as strong. But in the Spanish gangs, it's very strong.²³

These explanations appeared consistent across law enforcement agencies.

Michael Genelin, head of the Hard Core Gang Unit in the County Office of the District Attorney noted that the perception of racial bias was of concern to their office and offered an explanation for the FBI's decision to target the Shoreline as one of the gangs under federal investigation in Los Angeles:

But the reason the (FBI) task force targeted Shoreline was on (pause) for several reasons. One, Shoreline is more amenable to targeting because they do a tremendous amount of street dealing. ... You could use all kinds of investigating tools to get them. Whereas the V13 did a lot of dealing behind closed doors where it's hard to get to. And there were a number of informants that were available with relationship to Shoreline that were not available to V13. Okay? And so Shoreline was targeted because they were perceived as the easy or the target that we could do something, or they could do something with, you know. They made that decision.

Genelin was concerned about community perceptions that there may be racial targeting of African Americans, but stated that it was hard to avoid given the different modes of operation between the Shoreline and V-13. He explained, "We tried to make that clear (that we were not interested) in favoring anybody. We just wanted the shooting war to stop, and so we tried to figure out ways to also penetrate or to attack primarily V-13. And it was very difficult, again, because of the way one gang operated vis-a-vis the other gang."²⁴

Regardless of intent, law enforcement actions under the firefighter approach had the effect of increasing the salience of racial identity boundaries among African Americans which gang members and affiliates tried to exploit in order to maintain or gain community support. This also made it more difficult for individuals to initiate greater dialogue across color lines and also dampened initial willingness among African Americans to work with police, including several African American officers who were trying more creative ways to tackle the problem together with residents.

A Reframing Effort to Realign Publics

Allegiances and alliances drawn across identity group boundaries were being contested. While there were many community activists or community-minded residents and social service agency personnel who called for peace and interracial unity in the face

of violence, there were also those who would potentially benefit from further racial division and *intra*-racial unity, including gang members and their associates. One of the prevalent beliefs they promoted was that they were protecting the community from Latinos and the police who sided with them. Distrust and resentment towards the LAPD based on residents' experiences and on what they had heard from others gave credence to the idea that the gangs offered them protection that police were not providing. One resident shared an exchange with Shoreline members:

There was a lot of blacks that was in Oakwood that had gotten shot. They were in Oakwood. But then when (other gang members) start hearing about their homies being shot, then a lot of them came back from the Valley and different other places to help them defend Oakwood area. And the black gangs had said to me, "If we weren't here, you would be dead because the police wasn't here to protect you." And that is very true. The police wasn't here as protection.²⁵

A much more ambitious effort to rally African American residents to back up the Shoreline and their defenders was initiated by Timothy Crayton under the name of the "Venice Pathfinders." A group of young to middle-age African American men who lived or worked in Oakwood and who were from different walks of life had begun to meet in early summer 1994 to discuss strategies for intervention. Crayton, though present in that group, took his own initiative to distribute two different leaflets calling for support in the fight of "Black men" against victimization by the police and Latino gangs. One leaflet was directed towards African Americans in Oakwood, while the other was addressed to patrons of businesses in the surrounding retail and commercial strips. The former leaflet urged residents to "STOP SNITCHING" and stated, "WHEN YOU SEE BLACK MEN CARRYING GUNS THROUGH YOUR YARD, SUPPORT HIM, - GIVE HIM A HAND FULL OF BULLETS! OUR YOUTHS ARE OUT THERE RISKING THEIR LIVES TO PROTECT YOU OLDER FOLKS FROM MEXICAN BULLETS!" The second leaflet headlined, "WARNING: UNSAFE AREA" and warned "WHITE CUSTOMERS SHOPPING IN THIS SECTION OF VENICE MAY BE SHOT DEAD BY MEXICAN GANGS - WITHOUT NOTICE." (See Exhibit 7.1) The intent of these leaflets was to gain support from within the neighborhood for the Shoreline as well as to try to redirect public attention to Latino gang members whom he believed were being favored by police.²⁶ Soon after the distribution of these leaflets, Crayton was arrested on parole violations, charges which he protested.

STOP SNITCHING

PEOPLE OF THE OAKWOOD COMMUNITY:

STOP CALLING THE POLICE ON OUR YOUNG PEOPLE. OUR YOUTHS ARE BEING ARRESTED, VICTIMIZED AND UNFAIRLY PUNISHED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT. OUR YOUTHS ARE BEING SHOT ON A DAILY BASIS BY ORGANIZED MEXICAN GANGS FROM MANY DIFFERENT NEIGHBORHOODS OF LOS ANGELES. LATINO POLICE FAVOR MEXICAN GANGS WHO SHOOT BLACK PEOPLE IN VENICE.

WHEN YOU SEE BLACK MEN CARRYING GUNS THROUGH YOUR YARD. SUPPORT HIM. - GIVE HIM A HAND FULL OF BULLETS! OUR YOUTHS ARE OUT THERE RISKING THEIR LIVES TO PROTECT YOU OLDER FOLKS FROM MEXICAN BULLETS!

ON TUESDAY, JUNE 14, 1994, A POWERFUL UNITY MEETING WAS HELD AT NEW BETHEL CHURCH. THE PASTORS OF LOCAL CHURCHES IN VENICE, THE YOUTH AND THE NEW LEADERSHIP OF TODAY'S VENICE AGREED TO PASS ON THE WORD: "STOP CALLING THE POLICE ON OUR BLACK YOUTHS".

WARNING: UNSAFE AREA

WHITE CUSTOMERS SHOPPING IN THIS SECTION OF VENICE MAY BE SHOT DEAD BY MEXICAN GANGS - WITHOUT NOTICE

V-13 GANG MEMBERS
CULVER CITY BOYS GANG MEMBERS
OTHER MEXICAN GANGS

THEY ARE NOW INCREASING THEIR SENSELESS KILLINGS IN THIS BUSINESS/SHOPPING AREA.

PROTECT YOURSELF. IT IS UNSAFE TO SHOP HERE. YOUR CHILDREN MAY BE SHOT. ARM YOURSELF. PENAL CODE SECTION 26.8 STATES THAT ANY CITIZEN WHO ACTS OR USES DEADLY FORCE WHILE CONFRONTED BY THREATS AND MENACES CAN NOT BE CHARGED WITH A CRIME. PENAL CODE SECTION 692-694 GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO USE DEADLY FORCE TO DEFEND YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS FROM HARM.

**VENICE PATHFINDERS, AN ORGANIZED GROUP OF LOCAL AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN, ARE COMMITTED TO REAL SOLUTIONS FOR THE VENICE SITUATION. NEW LEADERSHIP - STRONG COMMITMENT
LET'S TALK PLANNED EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS. VENICE PATHFINDERS 310/392-5540**

The attempts to reinforce racial boundaries of division were aided by police actions which supported perceptions of racial bias against, in this case, African Americans. The more pervasive the belief that the police were conspiring to rid the neighborhood of not only gang members but of the African American community as a whole, the more polarized the situation became and the more difficult it was to mobilize residents to intervene between the warring parties.

A Realignment of Publics

To summarize, we can see that the major identity boundaries that were salient among neighborhood residents in this situation were gang and race. This is not to imply that there were no other subgroups based on the intersection of additional identity markers. Nor does this imply that those who were neither Latino or African American were not affected by these events. For heuristic purposes, however, I have focused on two of the more salient identities for those more closely affected by events surrounding the war.

Police actions under the firefighter approach seemed to increase the salience of race relative to distinctions between those who were formally gang members and those who were not. Police practices fed into the gentrification narrative and conspiracy theories that were then rewoven to blur the gang distinctions between gang members and non-members while emphasizing racial and also class boundaries. This resulted in a shift in the relative salience of race and gang boundaries among many whose identity was among others, African American.

The shift in the relative salience of race and class had several implications. First, it signified a stronger alliance among African Americans who might have been threatened by the prospect of gentrification. The idea that the Shoreline were protecting some or all residents from this prospect created an environment in which it became more difficult to voice opposition to their activities, especially given the social ties between gang members and non-members with whom they associated or were related even despite the increasing level of frustration among residents at-large. Secondly, those who read the police as unjustly siding with Latinos expressed increased resentment and bitterness towards their Latino neighbors, resulting in even greater social distancing and polarization. This helped to create a social atmosphere which made it difficult to initiate cross-racial dialogue. There were individuals for whom the salience of race was not affected and for whom class or political bonds remained dominant in their interactions and relations. The activities of these publics will be discussed more in Chapter 8.

Suffice it to say that the increased racial antagonisms among residents placed social pressures and constraints on those who would advocate for racial harmony and collaborative efforts for peace.

Increased frustration and the continuation of conflict

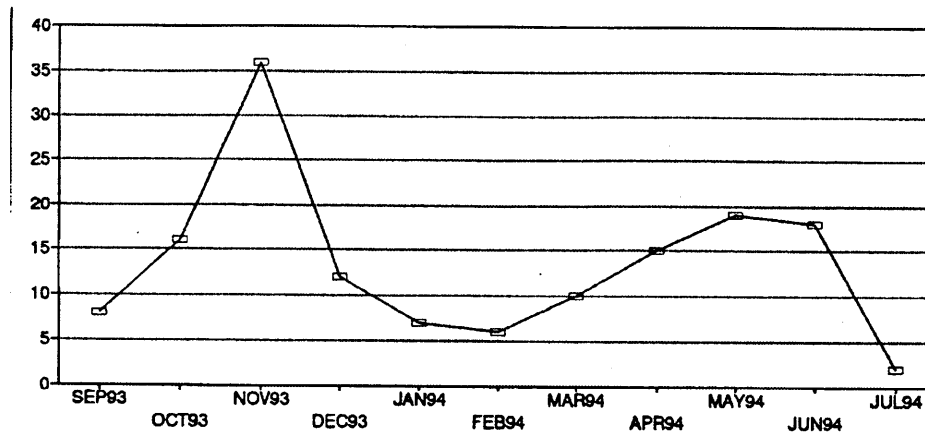
Incidents of Violence: What the Statistics Tell

Figure 7.1 charts the number of reported gang-related crimes over the period of the war. As chronicled in the previous chapter, conflicts began brewing earlier in 1993 in both the Mar Vista Gardens and in Oakwood. The two conflicts began dovetailing in the summer and early fall. In September, Operations West Bureau (OWB) CRASH had been called to investigate five cases of attempted murder and three cases of aggravated assault.²⁷ It was also in September that Benjamin Ochoa was killed. The conflict began to escalate in October with the double murders of Anthony Bibbs and John Anthony Kelley, the latter suspected as being killed in retaliation for Bibbs, both on October 10, 1993. For the entirety of that month, OWB CRASH investigated a total of five cases of aggravated assault, eight cases of attempted murder and one case of an attack with a deadly weapon upon a police officer.²⁸ In late October the LAPD implemented the major search and seizure operation as described earlier.

November 1993 saw the greatest number of attacks and the greatest number of murders in a single month of the war's duration. Six people were murdered, including two women, Sienna Antwine and Cleo Young, neither of whom were members of the gangs involved but were apparently in proximity of other male victims who were either killed or injured. In addition to the six murders, OWB CRASH also recorded 23 cases of aggravated assault and seven cases of attempted murder.²⁹ These incidents occurred on fourteen different days and include only those reported to the police department.

Fighting subsided during the Christmas holidays in December. An earthquake rocked the Los Angeles basin in January 1994 which resulted in structural damage primarily in the San Fernando Valley and kept families occupied with the aftermath. Damage also extended to the westside including the Venice area. Fighting began to increase again in February and continued through June when the truce was reached. One explanation for the ineffectiveness of suppression activities and the increase in the number of incidents immediately after the time of the search and seizure operation is that these activities they altered the balance of power.

Figure 7.1
Crimes Investigated by LAPD Operations West Bureau CRASH



Total crimes investigated: 149

Source: Los Angeles Police Department, Operations West Bureau—CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums)

Altering the Balance of Power

There was a rumor that the Shorelines would “hit” three Latinos for every African American “hit” by gunfire. Whether or not this rumor was true or whether the rumor was spread as a tactic to stave off further attacks upon them and their relations is not clear. From incident reports, however, it is certain that there were a greater number of Latinos who filed police reports as victims of assault or attempted murder compared to African Americans at a ratio of 9 to 5. In other words, there were almost twice as many reported Latino victims compared to African Americans, indicating that there may have been some truth to the rumor, assuming that the perpetrators of attacks against Latino victims were members of the Shoreline for which there is little evidence to the contrary. It is possible that the perception among the Shoreline that they were prey of “two gangs”—the “brown” and the “blue”—moved them or was justification for them to take more drastic actions.

Aside from interpretations of police practices, the raids may also have affected the intensity of conflict by altering the composition of Shoreline members who were active on the streets. The raid resulted in the arrest of several influential members of the Shoreline, giving their members who had moved over from Mar Vista a greater voice among those who remained out of prison. Because the subpoena was issued in

response to charges of arson that took place within the Oakwood section of Venice in the aftermath of the 1992 civil unrest, almost all the individuals named in the subpoena resided in Oakwood. However, Shoreline members from Mar Vista tended to be more aggressive in their actions since they had been involved in intense battles over turf with Latinos for over a year before being firebombed and driven out of the Mar Vista Gardens housing project. In contrast, the Shoreline and the V-13 based in Oakwood had relatively amicable relations, which eroded after the turf battles in Mar Vista and were aggravated with the relocation of Mar Vista Shoreline members to Venice. In other words, the arrest of Oakwood-based Shoreline members altered the composition among those remaining. It is very possible that these arrests may have contributed to the prominence of certain individuals from the Mar Vista Shoreline within the organization, shifting the internal balance of power in such a way that conflict was intensified.

Paradoxical perceptions of police power

Over the course of the war, it had become increasingly evident that, short of a drastic increase in resources, declaration of martial law or hailing the national guard, the current allocation of police and other law enforcement officers could not control the violence. Even with beefed-up patrols in the one-square-mile Oakwood neighborhood of Venice, shootings were still taking place. LAPD Lieutenant John Weaver expressed his

frustration with what he described as evidence of the deliberateness of the shooters:

Now the Oakwood area is only two square miles.... Probably on that night, (there are) ten cars--that's twenty officers. The metropolitan division is down there.

CRASH was down there. The Oakwood Task Force was down there, and any Pacific units. There were four different police entities that had units in that area that evening, and you had two murders occur. Over the next six months there is this enormous number of police officers dedicated to this small area. They continue to do the shootings and killings, you know, literally, literally under the noses of the police officers.³⁰

Not only did the violence continue, it spread over a larger geographic area. The initial series of incidents were centered in Mar Vista Gardens and in Oakwood. As the war

Location of Incidents, September 1993 - June 1994

September 1993 - October 1993



November 1993 - January 1994



February 1994 - June 1994



Source: Los Angeles Police Department, OWB CRASH

progressed, incidents took place in a larger area between the two originating points. (See Map 7.1)

There is an irony to the creation of moral panics--the social construction of problems creating societal alarm leading to major policy shifts. While the panic created over the problem of crime successfully fueled the political momentum that led to the creation of greater police powers and a beefed up police force, the real power of such physical forms of social control was nowhere near that which publics were made to believe exists. The fallacy of the moral panic lay in its falsification of power--who could exert it, what forms it took, and how it could or should be used. Power lay with those who placed their faith in government agents and who were disempowered by overblown expectations of uniformed officials. Those uniformed officials knew very well their limited capabilities but must pretend to hold power to preserve their limited authority. Yet the more they boasted authority, the less power they in actuality had, since the techniques of power they possessed were made potent to the extent they were able to empower the community to work in partnership.

The case of police response to the gang war in Venice demonstrated the limited power of a strictly physical demonstration of force. No one understood the limited powers of the police more than the police officers themselves. While they drove their patrol cars through the neighborhood, shots would be fired on a street corner minutes after turning it. Their inability to control the streets began to undermine their own authority. As one officer said when asked what we can learn from this experience for the future, "You can't expect the police department to really have control over a neighborhood and what goes on there" without the community which "pretty much takes care of their own problems."³¹

In addition, officer morale throughout the force had reached an all-time low. Frustration had long been stewing within the ranks of the LAPD over a number of issues, most significantly the citizen response to the videotaped beating of Rodney King and some of the workforce and wage policy changes brought about by the appointment of the new police chief along with the then-pending union contract negotiations. The acquittal of the LAPD officers on trial for the beating of motorist Rodney King in April 1992 led to the largest civil unrest in recent US history. Police officers assigned to the Oakwood area still felt the repercussions of the beating and its aftermath. LAPD Detective Rogers shared his frustration with the outcome of the federal trial of the police beating of Rodney King:

The police do not believe they have any support. The individual officer just looks at the Rodney King thing and (says), "By the grace of God, it could've been me. Who's to say that I wouldn't have hit that guy." ...You know, and officers are still human beings. They go, "Wait a minute. I'm involved in a fight with a guy and I'm not to get emotionally involved?" So the officer loses his temper and for eleven seconds, he ends up spending ten years of his life in prison. Twenty years of incredible work, and eleven seconds puts him in prison. There's no balance there.³²

He also explained:

I think the officers, the actual policemen out there, feel that they're in a very hostile, not physically hostile, (but) very politically hostile environment that they have no protection in. ... And they feel very isolated. And when you're isolated, you're not very brave about just jumping in there, unless you're really stupid. They know what the right thing is to do, and they gotta push themselves to (do it). So there's not the aggressive attitude you would've had a couple of years ago. It's just not there at all.³³

On the other hand, street officers who felt they were doing the best job they could expressed frustration at the lack of recognition given those officers who repeatedly risked their lives in the line of duty. One patrol officer who worked in the Pacific Division for most of his career expressed his frustration at the "pounding" they received from the public:

I could tell of at least three times officers went into vehicle pursuit chasing guys with AK-47s, foot pursuits of people with guns. (Police) intervened in dangerous situations. ... When officers put their life on the line, it seems you never get acknowledged for those things. They like to give criticism and say that police don't care and police just escalated the gang war, when the opposite is the truth. If that was the truth, why were we going chasing people with guns? We don't take sides.... I guess you can tell it frustrates me. It's been that way and it's always going to be that way. I just accept it as part of the way it is. It still bugs me after fourteen years.³⁴

Morale was also affected by the tensions within the ranks of the LAPD between those who embraced a community-oriented approach and those whose loyalty remained with the previous Chief Gates and his traditional brand of law enforcement. Some officers believed that the change in leadership from Chief Gates to Willie Williams hailed

a “loss of aggressiveness.” This frustrated those officers who were trained to believe that forceful policing was the superior method and were skeptical of a “community-oriented” approach. The new Chief Willie Williams’ approach emphasizing community-oriented policing was just beginning to seed within the ranks, but stiff resistance from within the force hampered its implementation. Resistance to change was also steeped in management and communication styles, personnel procedures, and a host of other factors related to the internal politics of the police department and its relationship to city hall. Nevertheless, the philosophical tension surrounding methods of policing was exhibited in the differentiated approaches that officers took to the streets.

Thus on one hand, high suppression plans were in place, but many officers were in a state of demoralization because they believed they did not have public support. Those who did perform to their potential believed that their efforts were not recognized. At the same time, residents did begin to notice positive changes with new community-oriented policing and voiced a desire for greater police protection as the war continued, but were at the same time skeptical because of the lack of initiative shown by many police officers, interpreting it as a lack of concern at best and a reflection of a larger conspiracy at worst. Many residents preferred a community-oriented approach but were not sure of the department’s commitment to sustaining it and keeping officers in the neighborhood for the length of time it takes to build meaningful working relations.

There were various responses among residents to the perceived ineffectiveness of police. One response was a firmer belief in the conspiracy theory which argued that police were in partnership with developers to gentrify the neighborhood. The failure of this infusion of police to quell the violence ironically created even greater suspicion among residents as to the motives of the LAPD. Residents complained that they saw LAPD officers sitting in their cars or driving around the neighborhood while shootings were taking place one or several blocks away. One resident explained:

It was just that incidences happened, they arrived on the scene too quick. ... One (police car) went down the street around the corner, then this person gets killed. I mean, how are you not catching (these people)? You arrive on the scene right after it happened. Each time, an incident (happens and) you’re arriving right on the scene. You’re right around the corner. You just park down the street. ... It was just obvious that something was going on or something.³⁵

One well-circulated story reinforced the theory that police wanted African American and Latino gangs to keep fighting among themselves. One youth worker retold this story of police officers who allegedly made inflammatory comments to others whom he knew:

There was a Mexican guy who was friends with some Black people. He said something wild just happened. (He said), "I was up at the 7-11 and they [police officers] told me I had two hours to shoot some Blacks. 'Go kill you some niggers and we'll give you two hours to let you get home.'" (In another incident) I heard Mexican police tell my brother, "The Mexicans are up. They're ahead."³⁶

He explained that the same type of instigations were taking place on the other side and that many believed it was in the interest of police to have gang members kill each other off to save them the work of having to arrest people only to see them on the streets soon thereafter.

A second response was a sympathetic understanding of the odds that police officers face and the accompanying realization that police officers alone cannot curb the violence of the type seen in the Venice gang war. Those who responded in this way either believed that more law enforcement resources should be brought to the area or resigned themselves to the fact that the war would end of its own will or attrition of gang members themselves. A second response was based on the belief that the police did indeed have the power to stop the violence but were not committed to doing so. The fact that police touted such powers along with the circulation of personal testimonies by numerous youths that police acted in ways that exacerbated the war dovetailed with prior theories that police fueled the war as part of a conspiracy in cahoots with real estate developers in their joint efforts to gentrify the neighborhood.

In other words, mythologizing the power of the police worked to undermine their own legitimacy. Publicity promoting the need for increased allocations to law enforcement agencies--power and resources to investigate, enforce, penalize and incarcerate--may have led to the successful passage of the Crime Bill and other state legislation, but it also had the side effect of increasing expectations of their effectiveness. An unprecedented amount of police resources was allocated to this one neighborhood and yet the violence continued. Promotion of the belief that the police can control crime primarily by increasing their forces led to a rise in expectations that an increase in police patrols could quell the violence. When the police failed to stop the violence, faith in police power was shaken and theories of police conspiracy were

further fanned. As one religious leader described the feeling among his predominately Latino congregation, "A lot of people were feeling a sense of anger and a sense of hopelessness like no one really cares and they just as soon let us kill one another."³⁷

At the same time, the realization of the limitations of traditional police approaches created space for the consideration of other approaches. This other alternative would be to achieve a gang truce from within. This approach necessitated a more intimate understanding of the dynamics of gang violence and a relationship with participating gang members. It would demand an understanding of the multiplicity of views, interests, internal politics and institutional pressures among the parties involved--gangs, law enforcement agencies and community organizations. Though the gang war may have begun over issues of turf, in its escalation the war came to symbolize much more. The reputation of one's gang and revenge for those who were killed or injured were at stake. As the war became racialized, the stakes were raised even higher as acts of vengeance were no longer in the name of the gang but in the name of a people as defined racially. Boundaries in the line of battle were edging their way from a war between individuals to families to gangs to racial groups. Before others joined in the battle cry, the boundaries had to be reshifted and delimited at least to gang boundaries along which negotiations could meaningfully take place. It is to this next approach we now turn.

¹ These terms are my own and were not those used by law enforcement officials or in any public discourse as far as I know.

² Interview with Michael Genelin, Office of the District Attorney, 1 June 1995, Los Angeles.

³ Interview with Councilwoman Ruth Galanter, n.d., Los Angeles.

⁴ Information regarding agency strategies were obtained from interviews with the following agency representatives: Interview with Michael Genelin, Los Angeles County, Office of the District Attorney, 1 June 1995, Los Angeles; Commander Richard Legarra, Los Angeles Police Department (then-Captain of the Pacific Division), 10 May 1995, Los Angeles; Jule Bishop and Martin Vranicar, Jr., City of Los Angeles, Office of the City Attorney, 5 July 1995, Los Angeles; Lt. John Weaver and Det. Kevin Rogers, Los Angeles Police Department, Operations West Bureau CRASH, 21 November 1994, Los Angeles; Brad Carson, Office of Probation, Los Angeles County, 26 June 1995, Los Angeles; Councilwoman Ruth Galanter, n.d., Los Angeles.

⁵ Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.

⁶ Los Angeles Police Department, "The Oakwood Plan," manuscript, n.d., page 13.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, page 7.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ There was some discrepancy regarding response time as residents interviewed noted a delay in dispatching.

¹¹ Interview with Lt. John Weaver and Det. Kevin Rogers, LAPD CRASH Unit, 21 November 1994, Los Angeles.

¹² Los Angeles County Superior Court, mimeograph, 21 October 1993.

¹³ Los Angeles Police Department, mimeograph, n.d.

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- ¹⁴ Interview with Anonymous #18, n.d., Los Angeles.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Interview with Anonymous #2, 22 September 1994, Los Angeles.
- ¹⁷ Interview with Anonymous #14, n.d., Los Angeles
- ¹⁸ Interview with Anonymous #15 and #16, 21 December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ¹⁹ This surveillance operation resulted in federal arrests of some of their leaders, though this did not take place until after the war had ended.
- ²⁰ Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ²¹ Anonymous #32, n.d., Los Angeles.
- ²² Shaw, David. "Media Failed to Examine Alleged LAPD Abuses," *Los Angeles Times*, A-1, 26 May 1992.
- ²³ Interview with Lt. John Weaver and Det. Kevin Rogers, 21 November 1994, Los Angeles.
- ²⁴ Interview with Michael Genelin, Office of the District Attorney, 1 June 1995, Los Angeles.
- ²⁵ Interview with Anonymous #18, n.d., Los Angeles.
- ²⁶ Interview with Anonymous #33, 15 September 1994, 4 August 1994, Los Angeles.
- ²⁷ Operations West Bureau CRASH, "Gang-Related Crimes Investigated by OWB CRASH," mimeograph, 22 November 1994.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Interview with Lt. John Weaver, LAPD Operations West Bureau CRASH, 21 November 1994.
- ³¹ Interview with Lt. John Weaver and Det. Kevin Rogers, 21 November 1994, Los Angeles.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Interview with Officer Bill Snowden, 24 October 1995, Los Angeles.
- ³⁵ Interview with Anonymous #17, 21 June 1995, Los Angeles.
- ³⁶ Interview with Anonymous #24, 30 October 1995, Los Angeles.
- ³⁷ Interview with Anonymous #10, n.d., Los Angeles

CHAPTER 8

MEDIATORS: NEGOTIATION FROM WITHIN

As the gang war continued unabated, frustration and bitterness grew in all corners of the neighborhood. By the time the war came to an end in June 1994, 17 people were killed and over 50 were injured. Of those killed, less than one-third were members of any of the three gangs involved. Families and friends of victims harbored immense pain and bitterness over the loss of loved ones. Many residents had felt confined to their own homes over the ten months during which gunfire made public streets and sidewalks unsafe. The violence and heavy policing paid a toll on the once lucrative street drug trade in the Oakwood area, hurting the local underground economy. Business owners in the surrounding area began to feel the impact of the decline in foot traffic on their revenues. Local officials and business owners had become increasingly concerned about the impact of the war on the tourism economy in Venice, one of the most frequented tourist destinations in one of the core industries in southern California. Traditional high-suppression law enforcement approaches tried through most of the spring months were not showing any signs of effectiveness at stopping the violence. Except for a dip in crime statistics during the Christmas holiday season and immediately following the January earthquake that shook the Los Angeles region, the violence continued from the fall of 1993 through the spring of 1994. Many community groups and individuals sought an end to the violence, but few shared any cohesive strategy as to how it should be done. Finally, in June 1994, representatives of the V13 and Venice Shoreline Crips met and negotiated a truce agreement, bringing the war between them to an end.

The road to truce was a long and complicated one. While many groups, including law enforcement agencies as well as the gangs, claim credit for the peace that was struck, it would be erroneous to give sole recognition to any one group or individual. Many efforts were made over the war's duration. The residents who marched and held prayer vigils, the *veteranos* and OGs (Original Gangsters) who lobbied for resolution, the friends and relatives who refused offers to avenge their loved ones, mothers who pleaded with gangs for peace, community activists who worked to raise awareness of the broader impact of the war on the future survival of the neighborhood, community organizations that offered jobs and other alternatives to gang-involved youth, the individuals who dared communicate across racial divides, the gang

representatives who stepped forward to negotiate the truce, and the probation officer and his colleagues who helped arrange a meeting between them--all and more were part of the peace-making process.

Some say that the war would have died down eventually. Economic, family, police, and other pressures along with the inevitable attrition in the number of gang members available for "active duty," some argue, would have inevitably forced the gangs to reckon with a losing predicament. Inevitably, one gang would have suffered defeat or all would reach some form of settlement. However, there are others who believe that the war could have continued to escalate. All three gangs--the V13, Culver City Boys, and the Shoreline--had alliances with other gangs throughout the region. One law enforcement agent central to the peacemaking process expressed concern that one of the gangs was already prepared to bring in "back-up" had the war not been settled at the time that it was. Given the increase in racial solidarity among Black and Latino gangs, respectively, and the frequency of race riots within the California state prisons, racialized street gang violence had the potential to spread to unknown proportions. The size and organization of street and prison gangs created the potential for the localized war to spread into some larger conflict, as 1,000 gangs and 150,000 gang members were estimated to reside in Los Angeles County alone (Reiner 1992).

While it might be interesting to speculate the consequences of not reaching a truce agreement, what is more useful here are the lessons we might learn from the peace process that was realized. In this chapter, I will chronicle the major developments leading to the truce as analyzed using the concept of multiple publics. More specifically, I will examine the emergence of a network of individuals committed to a process of mediation and settlement. These networks of individuals I refer to as "transpublics" helped to reframe the problem and shift the configuration of alliances and cleavages that opened a path for truce negotiations. They tried to combine disparate efforts into a "carrot and stick" strategy that encouraged gang members to evaluate the costs and benefits of continuing the war. Through a network-based mediation approach, windows of opportunities were identified to work with gang members and proceed with some peaceful form of conflict resolution. A negotiated peace settlement was highly desirable. As a negotiated settlement, a truce had greater chances for sustainability, as compared to one imposed from an external force, particularly if that external force could not maintain a constant level of enforcement.

Frustration and Fragmentation

Police-Community Relations

As discussed in the previous chapter, relations between the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and segments of Oakwood residents were increasingly strained over time as the violence continued to flair. Those who had supported the use of high suppression tactics under the firefighter approach expressed frustration that law enforcement's response was not forceful or comprehensive enough and that more force should have been brought to bear on the situation. Some homeowners blamed the new captain whom they saw as taking too "soft" an approach. The presiding police captain of the Pacific Division, Captain Richard Legarra, had just assumed his position at the beginning of the war. He updated the "Oakwood Plan" with the "Oakwood Safety Plan" which had a larger community-based policing component as compared to the previous plan. Some viewed this change as abandoning the previous approach in favor of a more "lenient" community-based approach. There was a feeling among those committed to the original Oakwood Plan that had that plan not been "dismantled," the gang war would not have escalated.¹

Others, on the other hand, rather than thinking that the law enforcement response was inadequate, believed that the response inappropriately applied principles of suppression. In particular, many African American residents contended that high suppression tactics resulted in harassment and an "over-labeling" of Black youth who were not involved in illegal gang activity. One Oakwood parent explained, "The gang label is like a jacket, and once they put the jacket on you, there's no way to take it off."² They believed law enforcement had an important role to play but that police officers in particular were not helping the situation with their firefighter approach. They believed the approach only fostered gang solidarity among many youth and unnecessarily alienated many law-abiding residents.

Whether or not one cooperated or supported police efforts became a sensitive source of division among residents. The cooperation of several outspoken leaders of the predominately white Oakwood Property Owners Association with the LAPD created racial distance between white and African American residents, homeowners and renters alike. Racial group division between Whites and non-whites also surfaced within community organizations and social service agencies as a result of the differences in vantage points and interpretive frames through which individuals understood the gang war and what to do about it. As with resident-based organizations, the social service

agencies that chose to work publicly with the LAPD tended to become more alienated from the segment of the African American community which had taken issue with LAPD's handling of the war. Instead of coming together to coordinate their strategies to end the war, groups became embattled over what they should or could do about it. Since the LAPD was the most controversial player among government agencies intervening in the war, divisions were drawn according to real and perceived relations that groups developed with the LAPD. In visible arenas such as in public meetings or in police-sponsored community advisory board meetings, differences between individuals or organizational spokespersons over police handling of the situation often fell along racial group boundaries.

Tensions created over the intimacy of relations with the LAPD could be seen in the controversy over the role of the LAPD's Oakwood Advisory Committee, an advisory committee made up of community organizations and residents in the Pacific Division's westside. The composition of this committee was very similar to that of Oakwood United, a network of non-profit community and service organizations based in Oakwood and the surrounding neighborhood. There were several major differences, however, between these two bodies. The obvious difference was that one was sponsored by the LAPD which had selected the chairpersons of this body, while the other, Oakwood United, was sponsored by a consortium of community organizations and democratically elected its own board. The LAPD's task force was chaired by a white female and executive director of a health clinic located in Oakwood. Oakwood United was chaired by an African American male and head pastor of New Bethel Church also located in Oakwood. The LAPD-sponsored meetings were attended by invitation only, and residents perceived as "disruptive" were not allowed to attend, while Oakwood United meetings were open to the public. The fact that the topics of discussion in the LAPD's advisory committee closely duplicated those of Oakwood United raised questions as to the motives of the LAPD brass and created some distance between those who appeared to befriend the LAPD brass and those who maintained a more independent stance. The LAPD selection of a non-Black or non-Latino chairperson for this committee given the racial character of the gang war and the fact that the vast majority of agencies servicing low-income African American and Latino families were headed by whites added tension to a broader social dynamic. The structure and composition of the LAPD-sponsored Oakwood Advisory Committee mirrored the unequal relations between whites and non-whites in a racially segmented hierarchy

within many private and public institutions throughout the city and society at-large. While the controversy over the distinction between the role of the LAPD committee and Oakwood United was clarified by differences in the geographic boundaries upon which they focused (LAPD's advisory committee would focus on a "broader geographic area"), the social distance stirred between organizations and individuals by LAPD's real or perceived relations with each nevertheless impacted interorganizational and racial relations.

Frustration among Residents

Meanwhile, frustration and intolerance towards the continued violence rose among all segments of the affected neighborhood. Pastor Marvis Davis of the New Bethel Church in Oakwood relayed the sentiments of many residents, including many of those who had friends and family members involved in the war, who were fed up with the violence:

Children, mothers, relatives, long time family were just saying, "Enough is enough." When it first got started, those are the gang rules. Somebody gets taken out, we go take somebody out. And after that tit for tat kept going on and on and on, eventually somebody gets tired and fed up, saying, "Hey, this is enough."³

Wives and girlfriends expressed frustration with the extra responsibilities incurred since it had become dangerous for the younger men to walk the streets. Gang members were increasingly tired of being cooped up indoors. And for those reliant on the street economy, it was becoming harder to maintain their economic activity. One observer described:

Black people were getting tired of staying up in they house and having the girls get everything for them when they wanted a soda pop or whatever. And money was running thin. To go out there (to deal), you don't know if they were going to pull a gun out on you.⁴

Vocal opposition to the violence also grew. Community residents and supporting community organizations organized activities to voice their desire for peace. Several peace marches were held where upwards of 100 people took to the streets with placards and chants to make their views known to those involved in the war. In February 1994, several churches and community groups jointly organized a march through the streets of Oakwood. In May 1994, a Mother's Day Rally was held at the Oakwood Recreation Center with various speakers calling for peace. One of those

given acknowledgment was Rosie Lodge, mother of one of the slain African American men who worked as an orderly at the UCLA Medical Center. In addition, voices from other parts of the city were pleading for a halt to the violence, including the Mothers of East Los Angeles on the opposite side of town. This put added pressure on the gangs to end the war.

While there was increasing frustration among residents with the ineffectiveness of police and with their application of suppression tactics, many residents also became more willing to work with or dialogue with police on these issues. This sent a stronger message to gang members on all sides that the community around them was becoming increasingly intolerant of their actions and would provide little if any protection from law enforcement if the war continued. On one occasion, a contingent of residents, primarily African American but also joined by Latino and white residents, attended a police commission hearing to demand greater police protection from the violence of the gang war.

Pressures on police and gangs

Police and other law enforcement agencies were under increasing pressure from elected officials and local businesses to stop the violence. Complaints from residents about alleged misbehavior of officers during the war drew greater scrutiny from high-ranking officers in the Pacific Division and even LAPD headquarters regarding the policing practices of officers assigned to the Oakwood and Mar Vista areas. Contract negotiations between the police officers' union and the City of Los Angeles were taking place in early 1994, placing on one hand, some pressure to show their effectiveness in suppressing crime and, on the other, pressure to show evidence of the need for more officers and pay increases. In other words the proliferation of crime aided their institutional growth and well-being, but their inability to squash it was equally damaging. It was time for the LAPD to exhibit greater effectiveness. One change in operations under the new police Chief Willie Williams and Captain Richard Legarra of the Pacific Division, who was appointed to the Pacific Division under the new chief, was an augmentation in community-oriented policing. This shift was most visible with the addition of one Latino male officer and one African American female officer assigned to community relations police work in the Oakwood neighborhood. The Senior Lead Officer for the Oakwood patrols also increased community-relations activities as an additional liaison to community organizations.

The V13 and the Shoreline also faced increasing pressures, particularly from the fact that law enforcement agencies were honing in on their movements and from the repercussions of the increasing body count. Law enforcement pressures were felt in a variety of ways. Numerous individuals were getting injured, arrested, or put under law enforcement scrutiny or surveillance. FBI agents were visibly present. Gang members arrested for suspicion of criminal acts were tracked to insure thorough investigation and maximum penalties if convicted. The implementation of the "three strikes" provision of the Crime Bill passed in 1993 began to take effect, creating a more somber atmosphere for those considering crimes categorized as felonies. Increased patrols had put a damper on the drive-through narcotics trade, hurting the local underground economy that not only supported dealers, but their friends and families who relied upon the income from the street sales of drugs. Increased patrols placed additional restrictions on their outdoor movement, which grew more tiresome over time. These pressures were felt somewhat more heavily by members of the Shoreline because of the geographic concentration of their activities in Oakwood and the concentration of law enforcement on their operations.

This convergence of factors--increasing intolerance towards the violence, fragmentation among residents as to the most effective course of action and the building pressure on police and gangs alike--created both opportunities and challenges to find an end to the war. Publics, including gangs and residents allied along crisscrossing boundaries of race, place and organization, pursued various means to win support for their activities. There were a number of individuals who traversed these publics and tried to couple disparate efforts into some semblance of strategy for peace.

Transpublics and a network-based mediation approach

A network-based mediation approach emerged during the course of the war, informally combining the efforts of various law enforcement agencies with community-based efforts. It was based on the belief that the war must be stopped "from the inside out." It acknowledged the fact that individuals could "shoot and hide" even with the circling of patrol cars, just like the nation saw in the guerrilla warfare of the Vietnam War. Those who collaborated in this approach did not bank their hopes on any law of attrition, since they were aware of the capability of each of the gangs to call for back-up resources. They saw the best solution as one reached among the participants themselves.

I refer to those who led these networks as "transpublics," individuals who traversed various formal and informal group boundaries and who had developed an understanding of the multiple publics involved. They had a mental map of identity group boundaries and potential lines of division and alliance. This understanding was gained both from their professional and lived experience as well as a conscious effort to obtain information that could help them assess the position and stance of the different groups and individuals involved, from law enforcement agents to gang members. These transpublics did not necessarily agree on all points with one another, nor did they always share information between them. However, they were all committed to dialogue with one another, to seek some common ground and to explore avenues for resolution from within.

This mediation approach was not a tightly coordinated strategy, but a mutually understood approach taken by two loosely linked networks--a neighborhood-based network that included residents and individuals from various community organizations and a law enforcement-based one. The neighborhood-based network was comprised primarily of African American men who were familiar with the culture and players on the street, but many of whom were also linked, either by virtue of their profession or other prior experience, to "mainstream" institutions and organizations. It included former gang members, several older gang affiliates, city council aide Dermont Givens, members of community and youth service organizations and several residents with close relations with members of the Shoreline. This network formed over the course of interaction as individuals informally shared their assessments of the situation and ideas for intervention.

The law enforcement-based network was comprised of several individuals in the probation and police departments and the District Attorney's Office. One of the enforcement agents connected to this informal network was an African American probation officer in his mid-thirties by the name of Brad Carson. He was the probation officer assigned to Venice and had as his caseload many of the Shoreline and V13 probationers. Though kept an arm's distance away by many residents connected to gang members since he was known to rightfully revoke probationary privileges upon violation of legal conditions, his day-to-day duties offered him much greater dialogue with gang members and their relations as compared to other law enforcement agencies such as the police and the courts. But by maintaining dialogue with gang members and informal networks within the community, he was also looked upon with suspicion by

some of his fellow law enforcement colleagues. His relationships with gang members was seen by some police officers as going against the grain of the “tough on crime” movement which sought as a primary goal to apprehend and incarcerate; a mediation approach was perceived by some as “negotiating with the enemy.” Nevertheless, for those who believed in the potential of mediation, that concern was secondary. It was not the case that those who believed in a mediation approach opposed the use of high-suppression tactics in cases such as the gang war, but they saw high-suppression tactics as simply one tool in pressing towards some type of mediated settlement. They saw suppression operations as tools in a broader strategy that involved a combination of efforts among a wide variety of groups and individuals, including but not solely reliant on law enforcement agencies.

Key to the success of the mediation approach was the ability of those who spearheaded these varied attempts 1) to understand the different interpretive frames held by multiple publics, 2) to identify potential shifts in lines of cleavage and 3) to identify the points in time during which there was an alignment of goals or interests among individuals despite conflicting frames. An understanding of multiple vantage points allowed this network of individuals to combine divergent efforts into a more coherent strategy however tentatively or loosely defined. Transpublics were thus able to create or identify “windows of opportunity” to make steps towards peace.

Reframing the problem

Both the neighborhood-based network and the law-enforcement-based network of transpublics attempted to reframe the situation in the eyes of gang members involved. The neighborhood-based network promoted an interpretation of the war and the surrounding events in such a way that, in relative terms, raised the salience of “class” above the salience of “race.” Similarly, the law enforcement-based network promoted scenarios that raised the salience of “gang” identification over that of “race.” Again, individuals have a multiplicity of identities, but for heuristic purposes, I focus on two of the more situationally salient in this discussion. As the previous two chapters have shown, the major line of cleavage among conflict participants and residents who formed multiple publics had shifted over time. By the war’s midpoint, race had gained prominence among the various lines of division. The efforts of transpublics to reframe the situation to reshift salient group boundaries away from race helped open avenues for dialogue and eventual settlement. The two networks, however, took quite different

approaches and promoted two very different narratives in their attempt to persuade gang members to cease the fighting.

The neighborhood-based network framed the problem as an issue of poor vs. rich, attempting to the major cleavage from race back to family and class. This reframing of the problem from a “race war” to a “struggle to maintain Oakwood as a community where low-income people could live” conceptually placed African Americans and Latinos in the same boat along class, or at least income, categories.

Darryl Goode, the president of the Santa Monica chapter of the NAACP described how they tried to get residents and gang members to see the problem as one of community survival for African Americans and Latinos in the face of gentrification, thereby shifting, the major cleavage from race to class. He and Chapter Vice President Melvyn Hayward stressed that African American residents in Oakwood historically had greater political clout than other constituencies in Venice. With the tenure of former Mayor Tom Bradley’s administration and the liberal coalition that had long reigned in local politics. They argued that the decline of the African American community in Oakwood would threaten its livelihood as a low-income, affordable neighborhood. As Goode explained:

What we were trying to tell the Shoreline guys and some of the Latinos is if the African American community is gone, Blacks and Latinos will be gone. African Americans were targeted. If enough move out, there’s no place where people could go. Latinos aren’t targeted, but are vulnerable.⁵

Promotion of the theory of conspiracy between police and developers also served to shift the salient group boundaries from that between Blacks and Latinos to that between low-income residents, particularly minorities, and developers along with the police. This was consistent with earlier concerns among many African Americans who understood their survival to be dependent upon their continued fight against gentrification. The gang war had shifted the relative salience of identity group boundaries from that of class to that of race. The theory that police and developers were in cahoots to drive poor residents out by letting the gang war go on contributed to reshifting the most salient boundary from that of race back to that of class.

Many of the older *Veteranos* and OGs were also urging peace efforts based on the damaging impact the war was having on the survival of their community more broadly defined. Probation officer Carson described:

[The V13s] had their own OG's and they were always saying the same thing. "This is stupid. We need to have peace. We need to talk." And then on the other side, people were saying the same thing and some other Gs particularly were very, very influential as far as trying to settle things down.⁶

There were several variations in the narrative among the resident-based network that are important to note. Many individuals tended to emphasize the impact of the war on low-income families, repeating that Oakwood was the "last remaining neighborhood along the Los Angeles coastline where poor people could live." Others, however, emphasized the class or income differences between whites and non-whites. This conflation of class and race--conflating rich with white and poor with non-white--raised anxiety and ire among residents who thought themselves to be scapegoated as the beneficiaries of gentrification. In other words, the shift in the line of cleavage from race to class also had the effect of reviving long-standing divisions over gentrification, a division that had been fought with animosity between outspoken residents who tended to align most visibly along racial--primarily white and African American--boundaries.

At the same time, probation officer Carson and other law enforcement officers reframed the war, shifting emphasis from "race" to "gang" identity boundaries, appealing to their sense of survival as gangs and gang members. One necessary step in reframing the war was to tip the scale of perceived costs and benefits to create space for dialogue and reflection among those involved in the war. In the one-on-one talks, Carson tried to get Shoreline and V13 probationers to take stock of the situation and more carefully weigh the costs and benefits as members of their respective gangs. He explained:

Basically, I would ask them why are they having this war? What are they gaining from it? What are they losing from it, you know? What do they have to prove? They're not making any money. All their family members are mad at them. They're getting shot on a daily basis, they're going to jail on a daily basis, and they have nothing to gain. They were losing. All they had to do was look out the window and see that they're losing. Basically they were frightened, fighting over pride, you know what I'm sayin'? They ain't gaining nothing.⁷

To tip the balance of costs and benefits in the direction of heavier costs, Carson with the cooperation of the Office of the District Attorney and City Attorney introduced the threat of gang abatement. There were earlier rumors that an injunction would be filed that would impose heavy restriction on the movement and activities of identified

gang members. Documents for an injunction had been compiled and a formal injunction was under preparation targeting members of the three gangs by name. Carson conveyed this information along with his assessment of the political climate to those involved, as he described:

Then I would tell them why they were going to lose ‘cause law enforcement was going to come in and wipe them out. And all they’d have to show for it was either they’d be dead or have a long prison term. And then I would tell them that we were coming with the gang abatement program. And I said, you know, “summer’s coming around the corner and you know how law enforcement and LAPD in general doesn’t play that around the summer.” And all the tourists are going to come, and it’s going to affect the money, the economy. And when it affects the economy, they’re going to come after you.⁸

Perceptions among gang members that law enforcement was ready to selectively clamp down on their organization contributed to the salience of gang boundaries relative to racial and other identity boundaries. Together, these appeals were made to their sense of survival as members of their respective gangs as well as to their identities as members of larger communities of families and low-income residents who had long fought to protect Oakwood from gentrification. While the appeals were made to different sets of identities, they shifted emphasis away from the racial cleavage between African Americans and Latinos.

Shifting alliances and coupling strategies

The community-based and law enforcement network of transpublics shared the view that a “carrot-and-stick” strategy may be the best way to nudge gangs into negotiations. Individuals in these networks were able to traverse multiple vantage points and interpretive frames in order to identify windows of opportunity to reach a settlement. They had some influence with gang members as a result of their prior relationships with them or by virtue of their profession. *Veteranos*, OGs, friends, relatives and community workers had various ties with gang members directly involved. Probation and parole officers had legal powers to revoke privileges as a way to influence opinion and behavior. These factors combined placed them in a position to potentially mobilize disparate efforts to end the violence and package them into a more coherent strategy.

The networks of individuals attempted to package various efforts under an umbrella strategy that counterposed “carrots and sticks” made up of both incentives and deterrents. It conceptually coupled efforts of community-based organizations that offered opportunities (such as jobs, education, training, substance abuse programs) as incentives or “carrots” together with law enforcement actions (such as increased penalties, revocation of probation and parole, court injunctions, and increased surveillance) as deterrents or “sticks.” There were different variations of “carrot and stick” incentives and deterrents, some of which placed greater emphasis on swinging the stick and others that placed greater emphasis on growing carrots. Despite differences among those who shared this general approach, a common denominator was the commitment to the belief that an internally-brokered resolution to the conflict was the best way to end the fighting and the only way to sustain it over time. The carrot and stick approach was also appealing to those who felt strongly that youth should be given a chance to choose a different path for themselves and should be given positive alternatives from which to choose.

Implementation of a carrot-and-stick strategy by the neighborhood-based network was led by Dermont Givens, an aide to Councilwoman Ruth Galanter, while a law enforcement-based strategy was spearheaded by Brad Carson, a county probation officer. Both were African American men in their mid- to late-thirties. One of the major differences in their strategies was that Givens emphasized increasing the benefits of making peace, while Carson emphasized increasing the costs of continuing the war. This difference was a combined function of their occupation as well as their political views and assessment of what was pragmatic or possible given the constellation of publics.

Council aide Givens pursued a strategy to use the gang war and the army of law enforcement personnel assigned to the war as an opportunity to establish policies and programs that could address the broader problems of gang-related violence and the marginalization of young Black and Latino men. Givens was brought onto Councilwoman Galanter's staff in August 1993, after the first incidents in January, but before the sharp escalation in November. He was assigned to the Oakwood section of the council district. He spent much of the first several months getting to know residents, business owners, and staff members of various community organizations and agencies. He was generally well-received by a cross-section of the community, from more conservative property owners to gang members.

Givens believed in a “carrot *before* stick” approach. His general strategy was to give gang members a chance to make a transition to “legit” institutions and lifestyles before a heavy suppression operation would be unveiled upon them in order to win the trust and cooperation of gang members. He explained that in traditional carrot-and-stick practices,

It’s always been the stick. And then when it’s time for the carrot, ‘Oh we’re out of funds. We don’t do this and that,’ you know. So for me to maintain some credibility and just to be morally correct knowing this, there had to be something there for the gang members to say, ‘Okay, we can buy into this. We’re going to get something first.’⁹

Givens tried to develop incentives based on the desires of gang members who wanted to take “positive” steps in their lives. Gang members expressed two desires in this regard. One was to have mentors who could give them guidance and training to survive in the “legit” world. Their other desire was to have the opportunity to exit the cycle of the criminal justice system. This cycle often begins with suspension from public school. Repeated suspension or violation of specific codes often leads to expulsion. A high proportion of those expelled begin to hang out on the streets and some join local gangs. They along with those mistaken for gang members are often stopped by police in areas targeted for gang suppression activities such as Oakwood. Field investigation cards are filled out on youth on a fairly routine basis to gather information about suspected gang members and their whereabouts regardless of the ability of police officers to confirm gang membership. Many are placed in local and national gang databases. When LAPD officers arrest suspected gang members, their files are tagged and processed by special gang investigators and prosecutors, often under the STEP Act ruling that increased penalties for gang-related crime as described in chapter five. For those convicted of felonies, it became very difficult to find employment once released, as few employers were willing to hire those with prior felony records. Once in the criminal justice system, prison culture as well as the treatment of those with prior convictions reinforced patterns of relations which made it difficult to leave the system.

Givens claimed that he and various law enforcement agents with whom he worked came to some agreement and plan of action to cull the list of names on various gang databases as one opportunity for individuals to exit this cycle.¹⁰ He elaborated on the plan designed to give greater responsibility to gang members and local residents and

community organizations to work in partnership to address the more basic problems leading to illegal gang activity and gang violence:

Let the community decide and tell law enforcement who should be on that list. And if there were any people who, definitely, nobody had ever heard of ... get those people off the list. Then there were the marginal people. And at that point, several community people who lived in the community, worked in the community, whoever, would have to go and talk to that person and they would make a decision. The community, like three or four people would say, 'Okay. Well, you're on this list. You're a gang member. Now either you can stay on this list, or we will work with you. What is it that you want?' They can say, 'Get me off that damn list so I can live my life, and I will go into a program.' And there would actually be, like, mentors in the community that would be assigned to this person that he could talk to and whatever. So this person would know it's these people in the community that have your life in your hands. And if they say, "We give up." That's it.¹¹

Due to controversy over the details of the plan, however, these efforts were never implemented. Councilwoman Galanter fired Givens, believing that he was going beyond the parameters of his assigned duties and was acting on his individual agenda based on political beliefs that she did not necessarily share.¹²

While Givens worked with residents in the neighborhood and law enforcement agents, Brad Carson from the county probation office was independently making similar attempts to nudge gang members towards a truce. Carson was a member of the gang unit of the county probation office and his caseload included members of the warring gangs. His job was to get to know the youth and their backgrounds in order to counsel and refer them to appropriate programs through which they could gain training, employment, social, and other services. As a probation officer, he had the power and responsibility to rearrest those caught violating the conditions of their probation; this gave him leveraging power in affecting the behavior of probationers. Like police officers, probation officers had a steady, long-term presence in the neighborhood, but their relationship to gang members was very different from that of most police officers due to the nature of their responsibilities and their designated mission and objectives.

While Givens' strategy placed emphasis on the mechanisms and opportunities for gang members to make a re-entry into the mainstream labor force, Carson's carrot and stick attempt placed somewhat more emphasis on the "stick." He did not pursue

Given's efforts to convince law enforcement agencies to remove formerly identified gang members from gang databases. Instead, Carson gleaned "carrots" primarily from various efforts by community-based and private-sector organizations that offered opportunities and services to gang members, their families and others with whom they had close-relations.

There were many non-profit organizations which provided services to local residents, including gang members and victims of the violence. Several community-based organizations and businesses worked very hard to find alternatives for gang-involved youth, parolees, probationers, and ex-offenders. Several jobs programs were established and targeted recruitment of gang affiliates, offered employment to gang members, probationers and those considered "at risk." The Venice Community Housing Corporation, a non-profit affordable housing development organization, established a job-training program in the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing in Oakwood. Oakwood United, a consortium of community organizations and social service agencies, set up an economic development project distributing water-saving toilets. This project was set up for the purpose of employing local residents, targeting gang-involved youth. The Franklin Mint Corporation made a noble effort to employ gang members at a new facility they opened in Venice. This was one of the most celebrated efforts on the part of the private business sector in addressing the problem of unemployment among gang members. Other organizations provided activities for youth and social services for families affected by the violence. The Pearl White Theater offered a wide range of recreational and cultural activities for youth in the neighborhood. The Community Service Organization along with other social service agencies offered assistance to families of victims. The Venice Skills Center encouraged youth to participate in their education and training programs. Churches offered spiritual counsel and offered comfort and support to victims and their families. These programs offered potential leverage to reach those who could influence the actions of those directly involved in the war.

The "stick" was the threat of a court injunction that would bring a gang abatement plan to the affected areas. An injunction would make specific activities of named gangs illegal. The County District Attorney's Hardcore Gang Unit had been preparing an injunction against the activities of the three participating gangs. They had gathered testimony and evidentiary materials and prepared numerous documents which could then be filed in court to allow special laws to be imposed on the three gangs.

Such an injunction had been used to abate gang activity on Blythe Street in the northern section of Los Angeles county. A spokesperson for the Hard Core Gang Unit of the county Office of the District explained some of the features of the possible injunction and the impact that it would have:

We were going to say they couldn't carry beepers. They couldn't wear gang colors. They couldn't be on certain street corners where the dope was sold, anymore. They couldn't carry telephones. They couldn't carry graffiti equipment. There would be a curfew both for juveniles and adults. ... They could not solicit people. ... So, those were some of the things that we were going to ask for.¹³

This was a highly controversial policy which would, under normal circumstances, be strongly opposed by residents and civil liberty groups. But the violence was reaching such proportions that the level of desperation in favor of ending the violence would have silenced some of the opposition.

Both Givens and Carson, by virtue of their occupational positions, were in a fairly advantageous position to understand the perspectives of multiple publics. The nature of their interaction with communities, the channels of communication with gang members and their families, contact with community organizations, and their working relationship with a spectrum of law enforcement agencies placed them in positions to see the situation from a variety of vantage points. They utilized their position and the power or perceived power granted them to gain an audience which included individuals across a spectrum of groups.

Packaging the various efforts by law enforcement agents, concerned citizens, businesses and community organizations by themselves, however, did not necessarily translate to an end to the violence. Several steps needed to be taken in order for these efforts to have an effect on the war. In retrospect, there were three steps that helped chart a path towards truce. These steps included: a) forcing a reassessment of "costs and benefits" of continuing the war among gang participants; b) reframing the war and reshifting lines of cleavage within the gangs in terms that would allow them to negotiate with one another; and c) facilitating the logistics for dialogue between members of the adversarial groups. The next three sections will detail these steps.

Forcing an assessment of costs and benefits

In the midst of a gang war, participants were not in a routine of regularly measuring the costs and benefits of each action taken. Lives were lost and people were injured or driven from their homes, generating intense emotions ranging from vengeance and rage to sadness and fear. In the heat of such passions, the fighting generated its own momentum apart from "rationally" calculated responses. Hits were met with retaliation, commonly under the auspices of one of the gangs and sometimes at the initiation of an individual member or affiliate.

Perhaps more important than the specific carrot-and-stick proposals themselves was the opening of dialogue with participating gang members to assess the risks and benefits of continuing the war. In the heat of battle, plans for the next round of retaliation often takes precedent over a more thoughtful consideration of overall costs and benefits. Carson utilized his position as a probation officer to pull members of the V13 and the Shoreline who were on his caseload aside for one-to-one discussions. He explained:

I talked to them for hours, one-on-one, right here in the office. It's totally different than out there on the streets, out there when they're in group. One-on-one, and they let their guards down, too. They come in here and talk about their problems. They talk about all the stress and all the pressure. This is like a safe environment for them. And they just drop, you know, their guard. We would just sit down and talk, and we would just rationalize. You know, cause out there they weren't rational. Out there they were set on survival mode, they were almost like in a war zone. They were in a war zone. When they come in here and they get to relax for just a minute and they get a little bit of stress off of them, you know, it affected them. It was easier to have a rapport with them.¹⁴

Veteranos, OGs, community leaders, girlfriends, family members and others affected also pressed war participants for answers to questions: "How far does this have to go?" "Who is really losing and winning in this war?" "When will you stop fighting?" Cumulatively, the pressure and questioning had the effect of urging participants to reevaluate the costs and benefits of continuing. One African American resident youth worker shared the moment in time in which he realized the perverse costs and benefits to residents of the neighborhood. He explained:

I was sittin' cooped in the house because of the violence when it hit me. These white guys were all out there joggin' in their jogging suits, riding their bikes,

like nothin' was happenin'. And I asked myself, why are we stuck inside while they're playin' outside? The price of houses were dropping, but none of us had the cash to buy them and outside developers were scoopin' 'em up. It made me think, "Who's really making out in this war?"¹⁵

He and others shared these thoughts as they tried to call attention to the costs and benefits of the battle, appealing to the Shoreline and V13s sense of loyalty to the community and sense of self-preservation as a neighborhood.

Some of the younger and more active members of the V13 and Shoreline also began reconsidering the costs of the war. As one of the V13 who supported the truce explained,

"I got tired of them killing these innocent guys. If they killed all V13, it may have been a different story. (But) maybe it'll be your aunt or uncle who gets killed."¹⁶ This sentiment was also shared by some of the Shoreline who echoed:

I mean, too many loved ones lost. You know. Who wins? You know. I mean, who actually wins? We don't win, you know. They don't win. All they doing is losing lives. We losing lives. I guess we losing our freedom. They losing their freedom.¹⁷

Particularly for those in leadership positions, the burdens and responsibilities of facing friends, neighbors or relatives of those who lost loved ones began to wear on some of them. A sister of one of the Shoreline explained:

I mean, for a person to be given the status of being a leader of one of these gangs, whenever somebody innocent was shot or killed, you know, that person would have to deal with that because they've been given this authority to be the leader. You know what I'm saying? And that was not easy for these kids. I mean, speaking to both the Latino leader and the black leader ... that was one of the things that bothered them the most was the fact that somebody would be stupid enough to shoot somebody that didn't have nothing to do with this and then they would have to go to the funeral and look in the face of those parents. That was eating these guys up.¹⁸

The risks of continuing the war were unclear to gang members. On one hand, each side had a limited amount of resources in the way of money, guns and manpower and it was not clear how long such conflict would be sustained. At the same time, each had potential access to additional resources in the way of support from other gangs and the issue of sustaining battle was not insurmountable. Nevertheless, it was not clear

whether or not the gains from sustaining the war would be worth the costs. Threats and rumors of raising the body count on the part of the Shoreline also figured into the deliberations of the V13. One resident with friendship ties with both gangs shared her description of some of the dialogue between the Shoreline and V13:

[One of the things that led to the truce was] the gangs meeting with each other and saying, “We need to stop. Too many innocent people is getting killed.” “When you kill somebody, we’re going to take five of yours out.” And they didn’t want that no more, so they stopped.¹⁹

Controversy grew within the ranks of participating gangs over whether or not to continue fighting. It took an effort among those members who wanted an end to the war to persuade their associates to want the same.

G’s reframe within

There were many reasons speculated for the decision to end the war. Some believe the war was paying too great a toll on the drug trade. Others credit law enforcement for placing pressure on gangs in the form of arrests and threats of pending injunctions. Some suspect that threats between the warring gangs to increase the stakes of the war may have given incentive to stop the fighting before it escalated further. Some claim that a critical mass of gang members had problems with the victimization of non-gang members such that they became reluctant participants willing to seek an end to the fighting. Why gangs chose to settle a truce is difficult to confirm. It was most likely a combination of factors which converged at a point in time and that created a window of opportunity to explore negotiations. Regardless of the weight of these factors, gang members supportive of a truce faced the task of convincing their fellow members that negotiations to reach a settlement was the best step to take.

These individuals appealed to their memberships in slightly different ways. The Shoreline were in a somewhat more defensive position, as their ranks were less organized and felt greater pressure from law enforcement. For members who grew up in Oakwood, the gentrification conspiracy frame promoted by many of their relations resonated deeply. The fact that Shoreline members from Venice were so closely intertwined within the long-established social networks among African American residents gave those residents and transpublics among them some influence in reframing the situation. That the gang war threatened the survival of this deep-rooted community did move some gang members to consider the ramifications of their actions as urged by friends and relations around them. As explained in chapter four, Oakwood was the only

location where African Americans were allowed to live before racial segregation was made illegal and had special significance due to the perpetuation of that legacy. Central to the identity and collective memory among many African American residents was a legacy of resistance against removal and relocation which had more recently taken the form of neighborhood gentrification. The African American population had been in decline from the 1970s, and the survival of their historic community was part of their collective conscience.²⁰

A reframing of the situation within the narrative of gentrification served to pit real estate speculators, landlords and police on one side and low-income and minority residents on the other. The gentrification narrative explained police ineffectiveness in quelling the violence as deliberate attempts by police to let the war continue so that the gang members would eliminate themselves from the area. Opposition to police was conflated with preservation of the neighborhood against gentrification. To oppose the police was to protect the community. This narrative resonated among many of the participants among the Shoreline. To protect the community at that point in time as well as to protect their ranks was compatible with a peace settlement.

For Latino members of the V13, the reframing the predicament in terms of the survival of their “historic community” did not have the same impact. The main reason for this was the fact that only a few families with affiliations to the V13 actually lived within the boundaries of Oakwood. Oakwood did not have the same meaning as a historic or residential center for the local Latino or Chicano community which was much more widely dispersed. What was of greater concern, however, was their reputation and honor in the eyes of their rivals as well as their allies. A critical moment in time came after several members of the V13 came to feel that it was time to end the war. Their challenge, however, was to convince the remaining members that this was the best thing to do. This was no small challenge given the fact that their membership numbered several hundred and was comprised of numerous cliques or social circles. As a war defined along racial lines, the V13 could be seen as losing the war. Latinos suffered more deaths and injuries in terms of numbers of victims. However, of those killed, only a few were bonafide members of the V13. By reframing the war from that tallied along boundaries of race to that tallied according to gang membership, the V13 would not have to concede defeat.

Though more casualties were suffered by Latino victims, the actual number of gang members killed on each side was very close in number and totaled less than one-

third of all deaths. By reframing the conflict from one measured by a racial body count to the number of gang members lost, both sides "saved face." This reframing was very important, particularly for the V13 whose concern for honor was paramount in their deliberations. This reframing of the evaluation from a racial to a gang conflict was not automatic. Specific individuals had to take initiative and leadership to convince others that it was best to forge a truce. "It was reputation and what you have at stake that gave certain individuals respect and influence," as one associate explained.²¹ Normally, one individual has limited influence since there are many social circles within a large gang. But one of those who commanded respect at that time was able to successfully reframe the conflict to make way for truce negotiations:

(name) said to the group, "Listen, that's (number of people) they got. One of these days it'll be one of us. We're winning. They killed (number of people) members. That doesn't make us look bad. We could decide [to negotiate] now, or it will go on forever. ...There's no need to go on. We're winning the war. If it goes on, our people will get locked up with life." It was a matter of a good speaker, getting them to think differently.²²

As for other Latino victims killed in the war, he conceded to his fellow V13 members that the Shorelines "got the last shot: the two killed at Venice High School. But we didn't even know these guys."²³

Both the V13 and the Shoreline moved away from scorekeeping according to the racial identification of victims and shifted attention to their survival as members of their gang and as members of a larger community of families and residents respectively. Under the circumstances described at the beginning of this chapter, this reframing and relative shift in salient group boundaries opened opportunities for formal negotiations between them.

Facilitating negotiations

Transpublics as Go-Betweens

Dialogue was not opened without some groundwork and coordination among individual gang members and several go-betweens. There were individuals within the V-13 and the Shoreline who wanted to see an end to the shootings for various reasons mentioned above. It was necessary, however, for this set of individuals to meet and also to convince their organizations that a truce was not only desirable but possible to enforce. As one Shoreline member explained:

Well the meeting came with just a couple of people going that wanted it stopped on that side that never really wanted it to happen on that side, plus this side. It took those people to get together and then actually pull certain other people in on each side so the meetings could get bigger.²⁴

The probation officer who handled the caseload of Venice gang affiliates saw this desire to end the war among a set of individuals as a “window of opportunity” and helped to arrange a meeting between key representatives of the two gangs. While some believed that the meeting would have taken place regardless of Carson’s efforts, others felt that had he not arranged the meeting at that point in time, there may have been even greater violence after which time that opportunity would have been lost. Regardless, it was significant that there were go-betweens through which arrangements for face-to-face negotiations under terms agreeable to both gangs could be made.

Only certain individuals had the influence, interest and charisma to carry forward such negotiations on the part of each gang. Carson along with a fellow probation officer Jim Galipeau, whose reputation was respectable among the Shoreline, made logistical arrangements for a meeting between two representatives of each gang who had enough “juice” or pull. On June 13, 1994, Galipeau transported the Shoreline representatives while Carson brought the V13 representatives to a then undisclosed location. The representatives met privately for over an hour after being searched by both officers for weapons. Mechanisms were established to enforce the truce, including communications between gangs and internal sanctions against members who might violate the terms of the truce.²⁵

A truce was reached and violence came to an abrupt halt.

Carson credits the V13 and Shoreline members who negotiated the truce for putting a halt to the war. Carson's involvement, however, is significant as it represents a particular approach taken by a law enforcement officer in the context of the dominant policy environment of gang suppression. He understood from his conversations with them that they shared common concerns of “family pressure, fighting over nothing, seeing their homies get shot or taken to jail, and getting long prison terms with nothing to gain.”²⁶ As a transpublic, he was able to communicate these concerns across gang boundaries in order to help identify common ground. He explained:

I was going back and forth, you know, getting their point-of-view and then getting the other point-of-view, and then relating that to each other through me. I would say, “Well this is what the Shorelines think and this is what they feel,”

and I knew it was directly related to what they were talking about and it was a common ground so they had a common experience.²⁷

Knowledge on the part of each gang that the other was feeling similarly about the situation helped to pave way for dialogue between them.

Carson had also come to understand that neither gang would initiate dialogue for fear of losing face. He believed they needed a “neutral” mediator to arrange a forum for dialogue so that neither would have to cop to initiating it. As he put it:

They needed a middle man, an objective middle man, non-partisan, with no interest or nothing really to gain, and that could take the heat from both sides. They needed a way out, and that’s where I came in, you know, where the two sides can come together without either side saying that they made the first move. ‘Cause if you make the first move in that game, you lose. They hadn’t talked since September 26th of 1993 and it’s now June the 13th, 1994. So the first one to the table, the first one that says something, the first one that blinks loses, in their minds. I was like that middle man, that cap that could bridge it over without either one of them saying that they did anything. Without either one of them saying that, you know, they made a move for peace or cease-fire.²⁸

Because he had built a certain level of trust among certain individuals, he was able to make the arrangements for a meeting once the two gangs had made their own decision to attempt a truce.

Building trust for truce

One of the difficulties was to develop a system to enforce the truce. One of the concerns of the V13 was the organizational “structure” of the Shoreline. The V13 enforced fairly strict discipline on their members and felt more confident that they could maintain their end of the bargain. The Shoreline, however, were organized such that individual members had greater independence than within the membership of the V13.

A V13 associate explained his concern:

The Shorelines are loose. No internal organization. No one plays the role of speaker. No one could put people in their place. From our experience, that causes a problem on V13. If they have a problem with V13, we come to know how to control our people. How do you communicate with people who can’t get the message across (to their people)?²⁹

Part of the difficulty in enacting the truce was the initial lack of trust that remained even after the agreement was made. As one Shoreline described, the truce was “eased into.”

He said, "It took a 'put the guns down' system, or not put them down, but if you see me and I see you, let's not just straight start shooting. See if you can drive by and just watch me." At the beginning, the truce was "real shaky, 'cause you don't know if this man is going to start shooting at you. You don't want nobody to get the drop on you first, so it was like a catch 22 type thing."³⁰

Over time, the truce became more stable and, eventually, members of the Shoreline and V13 within Oakwood began to interact under terms of peace. The Shoreline member continued to explain the peace-building process:

The Oakwood community was still on edge, but they'd be over there playing their sports. We'd be playing ours. They'd be having their little, whatever, picnics. We'd be having ours. You know. And then it eased into it to where, we might not have spoke and then people started, "What's up?" "What's up?" And you know. They went to play us softball and, you know, then they start with the little positive type war. You know what I'm saying?³¹

There were several skirmishes that took place fairly soon after the truce but were put to rest, and mechanisms were established to insure better enforcement of their agreement. Fighting did not completely end, but as one observer put it, "There's peace, but there's still fighting. The difference is now there's no killing without thinking."³²

Residents and gang members helped to maintain peace over the months that followed. Events were organized to involve the youth in positive activities, including sports and recreational activities. A Pop Warner Football team that had gone defunct was reactivated. The Pearl White Theater held conflict mediation training for youth in their summer program. Others organized events specifically focused on supporting the truce. On February 14, 1995, a community celebration entitled "Bridge the Gap" was sponsored to demonstrate community support for the truce and to make a call to various organizations for the need to work together to address remaining problems faced by all residents in the neighborhood such as unemployment and education. Residents, gang representatives, police, social service organizations, and city officials were among the over 150 persons who attended the dinner celebration. Recognition was given to several of the individuals responsible for forging the truce. The event represented a message to all parties involved that residents in the community of Oakwood and surrounding areas wanted an end to the violence and supported all those who worked for peace.

Reification through evaluative narratives

Everyone involved, from law enforcement officials to gang representatives, claim credit for ending the war. The probation officer gives the major credit to those Shoreline and V13 members who took the step to negotiate the truce and also claims that had he not arranged the meeting for the particular day it took place, the war could very well have escalated and spread to other parts of the city.

Police claim that their increased presence hampered gang members' mobility and ability to deal drugs, putting social and economic pressure on them to end the fighting. One detective put it this way:

The violence stopped. That was the main objective, and that we accomplished. ...There's so many police that they've disrupted the narcotics trade there to the point that it was almost non-existent. Economically it was hurting everybody, so therefore, they came to an agreement, and so now they can get back to dealing drugs and life is back to normal.

The City and District Attorneys Offices claim that had they not prepared an injunction against the three gangs, there would not have been the threat that the Councilwoman's aide and the probation officer were able to use in their respective "carrot and stick" strategies. The Council aide Givens is certain that the carrot and stick strategy he forged with other agencies would not only have put an end to the war, but would also have been effective in the long term to reintegrate gang members into mainstream social, economic, and political institutions. Since his plans dissolved with his job termination, that remains unknown.

Gang members deny that law enforcement actions played any major part in their decision to come to a truce and claim that the major impetus was their realization that too many people were dying and little would be gained from continued warfare. The answer probably has to do with "all of the above." Their viewpoints are shaped by their own experiences and interests. Even if some did see another point of view, they may not tell me. The legends surrounding the war are sources of power that are guarded like the positions and interests which they protect.

¹ Interview with Anonymous #34, 23 June 1995, Los Angeles.

² Interview with Anonymous #21, 8 June 1994, Los Angeles.

³ Interview with Pastor Marvis Davis, 12 and 27 October 1994, Los Angeles.

⁴ Interview with Anonymous #17, 21 June 1995, Los Angeles.

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- ⁵ Interview with Darryl Goode, 14 November 1994, Santa Monica.
- ⁶ Interview with Brad Carson, 26 June 1995, Los Angeles.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Interview with Dermont Givens, 13 December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ¹⁰ There were several databases that maintained names and information on individuals identified by law enforcement agencies as belonging to a street or prison gang. Locally, a database was maintained by the LA County Sheriff's Department. Nationally, a database called GREAT compiled information from local agencies for nationwide tracking of individuals and their activities.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Interview with Councilwoman Ruth Galanter, 21 December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ¹³ Interview with Michael Genelin, 1 June 1995, Los Angeles.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Brad Carson, 26 June 1995, Los Angeles.
- ¹⁵ Interview with Anonymous #14, n.d., Los Angeles.
- ¹⁶ Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ¹⁷ Interview with Anonymous #16, 21 December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ¹⁸ Interview with Anonymous #2, 12 September 1994 and 10 August 1995, Los Angeles.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Anonymous #18, n.d., Los Angeles.
- ²⁰ The degree to which the idea of this "history community" was inclusive of other low-income residents across racial boundaries, however, was uneven among individual members of the Shoreline.
- ²¹ Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Interview with Anonymous #16, 21 December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ²⁵ Truce considerations with the Culver City Boys were saved for a later time which at the time of this writing had not materialized.
- ²⁶ Interview with Brad Carson, 26 June 1994, Los Angeles.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ³⁰ Interview with Anonymous #16, 21 December 1995, Los Angeles.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Interview with Anonymous #29, December 1995, Los Angeles.

CHAPTER 9

A THEORY FOR PRACTICE

If we look at the gang war utilizing the concept of multiple publics, we can trace the escalation of conflict along a series of shifts in the major line of cleavage over time--from persons to families to gangs and race. With each shift, the intensity of conflict grew while the size of constituencies and publics were enlarged. The shifts in the major line of cleavage represented changes in the relative salience of identity group boundaries among the many individuals involved or affected by the war. By taking notice of the multiple publics that emerged over the course of conflict and by understanding the interpretive lens through which each public saw the events that transpired, we can better understand how the turn of events led to such tragic outcomes. Likewise, the concept of publics helps us to understand how the truce came to be. That is, it helps us identify the various factors that influenced the decision of gang members to negotiate a truce given the concerns, interests and viewpoints within the gangs themselves.

Perhaps one of the main contributions that this case study can make is to inform us as to the steps we can take to address similar types of conflict utilizing the concept of multiple publics as an analytical tool for practice. I have organized this chapter in four sections. The sections can be seen as steps which should not be followed rigidly but which outline practices that were utilized, consciously or not, towards the resolution of the gang war which may be applied to other types of conflicts. These steps are: 1) mapping multiple publics and multiple identities, 2) seeing from the lens of multiple publics, 3) reframing situations and opening dialogue, and 4) making judgments situationally. I will conclude the chapter by commenting on the practice of transpublics.

Mapping Multiple Publics and Multiple Identities

Every conflict has a history. This history is often embedded in the memory of a place and the people who have lived and worked there over years and generations. To understand the social terrain--the map of social networks, of collective memory, of crisscrossing identity boundaries--it is helpful to understand the history of a place. We can refer to this type of mapping as the geography of multiple publics.

Without understanding the social history of a place and its people, it is difficult to understand why groups form as they do, why they see the things they see and why

they interpret them the way they do. Creating a map of multiple publics at one single point in time is helpful but limited. Without a better sense of the social history that led to a particular configuration and composition of publics, it is hard to know how stable that configuration is and how firmly those publics are planted. Without a historical view, it is also hard to predict how publics may reform under a new set of conditions.

The concept of multiple publics was premised on the assumption that every individual has multiple identities. These identities vary in type, salience and centrality. Types of identity boundaries vary from ethnic, racial, religious, a gender, occupation, family role, organizational affiliation, among others. The salience of group boundaries refers to the meaning and importance of the particular type of identity in a particular situation. And the centrality of boundaries refers to the degree to which a particular boundary maintains salience across situations. In this case study, we have seen how different types of boundaries--gang membership, gender, race and class--emerged and receded in relative salience across situations. The case study illustrated how a major line of cleavage could shift along any one of those boundaries, subsequently changing the composition of publics and creating or breaking alliances between them.

But how do they shift? Why do they shift? Can we predict future shifts? In order to begin to answer these questions, we need to understand the factors that influence the construction of individual identities, including interests, roles and preferences. Though it's impossible to build a comprehensive inventory of multiple identities within a population, one can gain an understanding of major identity markers among a community of people through dialogue, observation and interaction.

Interests are one of the more easily identifiable of the many factors that influence boundary salience. Interests can be material or symbolic. In Oakwood, there were very clear material interests expressed, including property values, rents, retail business markets, street narcotics markets, personal safety, organizational survival and freedom of mobility. Less tangible but equally valued interests included the upholding of personal reputation, organizational reputation, legitimacy, political power and social influence. Individuals and organizations valued these interests differently. Depending on the value that individuals placed on these interests and depending on their possession of them, these interests influenced the affinity that drew together publics and colored the way they behaved.

As stated in chapter three, interests alone do not define publics. The role that one assumes or that one is assigned also has bearing on how one identifies with events

and people around them. Roles in the family (such as mother, father or bread winner), organization (leader, officer, mediator, elder or liaison) and government (elected official, peace officer, judiciary officer or arbitrator) play a large part in the constitution of one's identity and commitment to a particular viewpoint and course of action. The stronger one's commitment is to a particular role, the greater one would tend to defend that role just as one would protect one's material interests. Roles and interests are often connected. For leaders of gangs and law-enforcement organizations alike, the ability to defend the organization's reputation had bearing on their ability to maintain a particular role in that organization. Within any public, individuals within it may have different roles both within and outside the group. An understanding of these roles was useful to understand how various individuals could shape public interpretations and possibly reframe situations. For example, the apprehension of certain gang members in Oakwood tipped the balance of power within the Shoreline. Without an understanding of the roles that various individuals played within the organization, the search and seizure operation was implemented with the possibility of intensifying the conflict by removing moderating forces. A better map of publics can help inform decisions and avert unintended consequences. Similarly, leaders of gangs had roles both within and beyond their organization. Appeals made to their sense of responsibility to their families and friends who were being hurt by the war did not go unheard.

Interests and roles often shape the concerns and priorities of individuals that comprise publics. Concerns may center on family well-being or pursuit of power, to name two examples. Individuals prioritize these concerns differently. During the gang war, some placed greater priority on personal safety over organizational reputation while others were more willing to risk their lives to uphold the goals and image of the group. Some gang members were more concerned about "sticks" while others were attracted to the "carrots." Some law-enforcement officers were primarily concerned about ending the violence while others were equally concerned with apprehending gang members. Some residents worried about race relations among neighbors while others were solely concerned about ending the violence and getting on with their lives. Even among publics who may share the same interests and roles, there may still be variation in how they prioritize their concerns. These differences, as with differences in interests and roles, are an important feature of the social topography.

Interests, roles, and concerns shape the way in which identities are constructed. Identities mark the boundaries of potential publics. Along with the social histories of

which they are a part, a map of identity boundaries give us an idea of the multiple publics that can become emerge under specific circumstances. They also alert us as to the location of major fault lines that have in the past or may in the future mark deeper social divisions that appear persistent across time. Race and class are two such boundaries that have maintained a high degree of centrality in the political history of Oakwood. Narratives that reinforce these boundaries tend to resonate more strongly within the public discourse. For example, explanations that real-estate speculators were conspiring to drive African-Americans out of Oakwood hit a cord among many Blacks who had long fought gentrification. Likewise, because of the simultaneous history of social relations across racial boundaries, pleas to deracialize the conflict also resonated. Mapping publics in this way reveals problems as well as possibilities for the mediation and management of conflict, as will be discussed further.

Seeing through the Eyes of Multiple Publics

At any given point in time there are multiple publics that see different realities. What do they see? How are they interpreting events and information? What types of causal explanations are publics constructing? How are these causal explanations affecting their interaction with other groups? It is difficult to understand the actions of groups within conflict situations not to mention the difficulty of influencing group behavior without understanding their point of view--without seeing the world through the eyes of each public. As mentioned in chapter three, it would be as difficult as solving a Rubik's cube puzzle while only looking at one side of the cube.

One of the problems that contributed to the lack of communication, even between groups and individuals who shared common goals, was the dismissal of others' interpretive narratives if one were in disagreement. There was a tendency among many to trivialize others' viewpoints without attempting to understand more deeply why their interpretations were constructed in the way that they were. Conflicting explanations as to why the violence was continuing or the forces behind the phenomena of gentrification represented vastly different interpretive lenses held by different publics. Wholesale dismissal of conflicting explanations led to greater social distance as opposed to increasing mutual understanding.

The inability of publics to see through the eyes of others led to the misreading of others actions as well as to the misinterpretation of information. When V13 members killed or injured those they considered to be Shoreline affiliates, Shoreline members

sometimes interpreted those hits as racially based in since they themselves did not consider those same individuals to necessarily be party to their organizational affairs. Retaliation on either side as if hits were racially based would result in racial targeting regardless of whether there was intent to begin that particular pattern of victimization. When the local newspaper issued news reports on the various incidents, they may very well have been unaware that their racial descriptions of victims and suspects could contribute to the racialization of the conflict. Attacks as well as reportage of them were often read in ways that were very different from that intended by the deliverer. What publics do not see is just as important as what they do see. When one lives in a fragmented or segregated society, it is easy to see only part of the world or one dimension of the community. There are often gaps in the knowledge base among people who live and work in the same place. Though individuals may be at the same place at the same time and see the same phenomenon, their reading of the events could be worlds apart. Not only that, when one tries to convey a message through words or actions, that message may be interpreted in ways that were not intended.

Over time, repeated misreadings can add an additional layer of complication to be already tangled conflict. This makes it more difficult to find resolution that is acceptable to various publics involved. If we can understand the world from the point of view of different publics, we can identify instances of misrepresentation, misunderstanding, or misinterpretation. This does not necessarily lead to any resolution, but it can prevent the unnecessary escalation of conflict. This can also lead to more productive dialogue between groups by not having to wade through a web of false assumptions and attribution.

Reframing Situations and Opening Dialogue

More than simply avoiding complications, being able to step into the shoes of different publics allows one to identify windows of opportunity to open dialogue where none may currently exist. Probably the clearest example of this in the case of the gang war was the ability of the probation officer to see that members in both the V13 and the Shoreline were getting tired of the fighting and were open to a peace agreement. These individuals may not have shared this sentiment even with members of their own gang given the norms and expectations among them. Conditions for reframing the situation were in many ways ripe. Growing intolerance among friends and relations coupled with the toll of warfare and increased suppression by law-enforcement moved at least some

of the gang members to doubt the feasibility of continuing the battle. Facilitating communication between the two gangs, in a sense, brought those individuals into a new public sphere. Those individuals, then, brought their fellow associates along with them as they agreed to enter a truce.

Creating new publics necessarily involves reframing a situation and shifting the lines of cleavage. Oftentimes, this means creating a bigger enemy. In this case, we can see several different attempts to do this. Some attempted to persuade gang members that the bigger danger was gentrification. In contrast, law enforcement officers wielded big sticks in an effort to shift attention to the potentially dire consequences of heavy suppression by law enforcement agencies. Each of these attempts resulted in a shift in the line of cleavage away from race and towards one that represented more urgent or serious threats in the eyes of proponents. This opened room for dialogue between those who would subsequently find themselves on the same side of the shifted divide.

Making Judgments Situationally

Since boundaries are simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, shifting lines of cleavage simply moves divisions from between one set of groups to another. Shifting salience group boundaries from race to class or from race to gang does little to eliminate conflict more than shifting the main point of friction. Who is to say that one point of friction is more desirable than another? When some of the residents tried to reframe the problem as one of gentrification, members of the property owners association felt themselves targeted as the bigger enemy. They believed that this narrative would only heighten class divisions and friction between whites and non-whites, as reflected by the make-up of their spokespersons who were almost exclusively white in racial composition. They certainly did not support such reframing and realignment of publics.

Is it possible to shift boundaries and reframe situations in such a way that new divisions are not created or that old divisions are not resurrected? This may be desirable, but possible only in a homogeneous society. But is homogeneity possible or necessarily desirable? Can we celebrate diversity while desiring inclusivity? Salience group boundaries are not simply evoked through sheer human will, but are also a result of history and social structures beyond the power of individual perception. Differences in lived experience, roles and interests, both the imagined and imposed, will continue to mark potential boundaries for the formation of publics. Forming bonds of inclusivity necessarily creates new barriers along those same borders. A substantive part of the

reframing process is to construct new narratives that define the boundaries between "us" and "them." Sometimes these depictions are value-neutral, but more often they laden with normative judgments as to who is right and wrong, good and bad, moral and immoral or worthy and unworthy. Reframing situations and shifting lines of cleavage is to address serious ethical and moral dilemmas.

From a pragmatic point of view, it seems most sensible to deliberate what is best in each situation. Otherwise, we fall into the relativist trap (there is no right or wrong since multiple publics experience their own reality and who is to say that one reality is more "true" than another) and become immobilized to take any action. Some would argue that shifting the cleavage from between racial groups to a division along gang organization, class or other boundary only added more antagonism to the already boiling cauldron. But in that particular situation, shifting the major cleavage away from race and reframing the situation was effective in opening dialogue between gang representatives. This is not to say that class divisions are better than racial divisions in a normative sense. It is only to say that, in this situation, the salience of those alternative identity boundaries created space for some form of peaceful resolution. Most would agree that a peaceful resolution was a priority objective at that time.

Were there other alternative boundaries that could have been evoked which would not have such divisive repercussions? Yes, and they were tried; some called for peace on humanitarian and religious grounds. Did these pleas resonate through the ranks of the participating gangs? No, at least not based on the evidence gathered. Is it worth making appeals to a more inclusive public? Surely, as broader identities can make for a more inclusive society and are not necessarily counterposed to diversity within it. But here again, we realize the limitation of discourse apart from what has been referred to as structural factors that cause division, such as inequality in the economy, polity, and social institutions. Experiences can only be reinterpreted within the parameters of what might be considered reasonable by those who live them. As long as structural inequalities and differences exist, identity boundaries along those dimensions of difference will persist, at least among those who experience them.

Challenges for transpublic practitioners

These steps are easier said than done. In order to map multiple publics, gain and understanding of their interpretive frames, join in reframing processes, and make judgments based on a broad view of the situation, one necessarily becomes a transpublic

practitioner. As a researcher, I observed these processes, but was only peripherally or momentarily involved in any of them, save for some of the community events supporting peace efforts in which I helped out. I did learn some things about traversing publics through my interviews with a broad spectrum of participants and observers spanning conflicting publics. It was clear that there are many challenges to succeeding in the role of a transpublic practitioner.

One challenge is to suspend common assumptions and withhold normative judgments about publics and their perspectives. This takes the certain amount of humility and a great deal of respect for others. Insincerity and judgementalism are very easy to detect, especially among those who encounter them often. An open and sincerely inquisitive mind is usually the most well received. This may sound like a church sermon one might have heard or something one's grandmother may have preached (or both in my case), but it is a simple teaching that goes along way in understanding people different from oneself. Suspending our assumptions and withholding judgment allows us to listen to people's stories so that we hear their meanings in the way they are intended to be heard (or at least as close to their intended meaning as possible). This also helps us probe and find answers to questions we may have otherwise overlooked. For if we impose our assumptions (they must think this because...), we would not only make false assumptions, but fail to understand differences in epistemologies, in how people come to understand what they do. Putting oneself in other's shoes means being able to think as others may think and learn as others may learn, at least to the best of one's ability. Understanding the assumptions underlying the logic or rationality of explanations and narratives is critical to anticipating how publics might interpret upcoming actions or events.

Another challenge is to avoid getting "caught in the middle." In situations in which groups are polarized, traversing publics is tricky business. To interact with "the other" is often to draw suspicion among an in-group. Transpublics are often vulnerable to accusations of being a traitor or a fence straddler. How one approaches other groups, and how one informs all groups of one's activities and intentions is critical to maintaining trust across publics. A good example of the difficulty transpublics face is a case of the youth worker. Gang prevention and gang intervention workers are often hired by agencies because they have relationships and carry influence with gang members and their families within a particular neighborhood. Some are gang members themselves or were formerly involved in them. Others may have friends or family

members who are gang-involved. At the same time, youth workers wear the hat of their youth agency. They dialogue with members of other gangs, law enforcement officers, social workers, teachers and parents. Their role as a youth worker often comes into conflict with expectations that their peers may have of them. Their peers may question their actions as well as their loyalty to them as friends, counselors or associates. It becomes important for transpublics to be clear about what hat or what role they're playing at any given point in time and to communicate that clearly to the groups and individuals with whom one is involved. This is not always an easy thing to do, since transpublics often have to switch hats from situation to situation. Failure to communicate which hat one is wearing can create confusion, misunderstanding and distrust.

Related to this is a third challenge. That is, for one to be clear in one's own mind as to which moral community one is serving. Transpublics can feel schizophrenic, moving from one group to another immersed in many realities in a short space of time. Sometimes it becomes difficult to make an independent judgment as to which claims seem valid from one's own eyes. Who do I feel morally obligated to? Which publics do I feel part of? How do my own identities shape my loyalties? What is the right thing to do in the situation I find myself in? To return to the example of the youth worker, the moral community to which he or she is obliged as an employee of a community agency would include all youth regardless of which gang they may be a part of. As a member of a gang or as a friend of a set of gang members, the same youth worker may feel obligated to favor some of the youths over others. In the Venice gang war, youth workers with relationships to members of one or another of the conflicting gangs were put in a position of mediating conflicts on the grounds of Venice High School. For the purposes of keeping peace on campus, it was important for them to gain the respect of members of both groups as mediators who were fair and unbiased despite their known affiliations. They challenged and supported youth on both sides of the conflict. Their own clarity as to the role they would play and their ability to communicate that in a forthright manner to the students were key to their success in minimizing conflict on campus. Their consistency over time allowed them to solidify the trust and respect necessary to facilitate mediation and mediation training among concerned students.

The concept of multiple publics is a theory for practice. It is an analytical tool that can be useful to assess the social terrain and to create opportunities to bring people and groups into dialogue with one another. It tells us how the interpretation of events

and actions either simplifies or complicates conflict. By understanding the interpretive frames among multiple publics we can better anticipate actions and reactions, read changes in group alignment, and minimize unintended consequences of interventions. For practitioners charged with the responsibility of intervening in such conflicts, the concept of multiple publics can shed light on the nuances and fluidity of intergroup dynamics. This is helpful in identifying windows of opportunity for mediation or resolution. It avoids a static view of groups or a one-dimensional characterization of individuals that can lead to misguided action and missed opportunities. And hopefully, it can be used to address similar problems before the unnecessary loss of life.

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